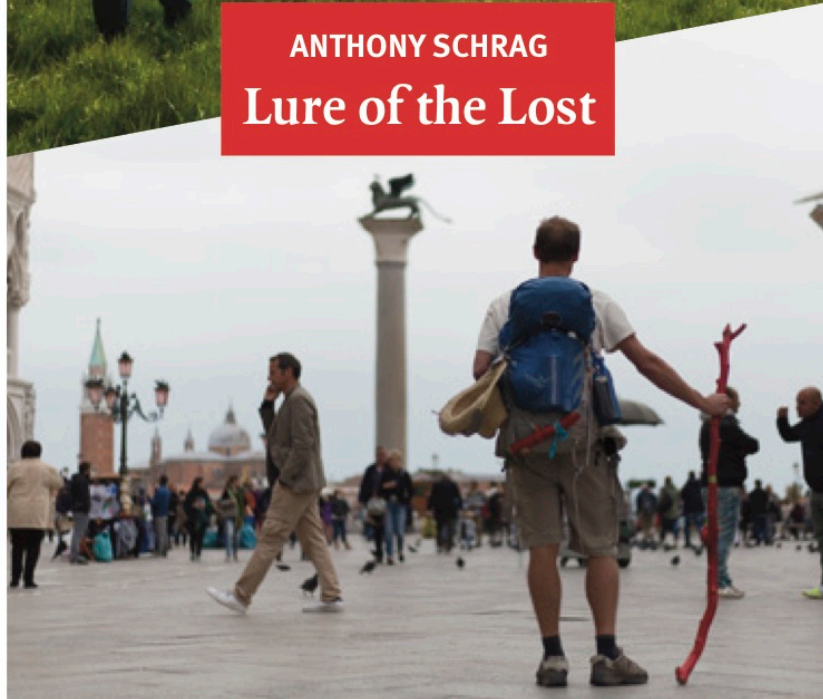




ANTHONY SCHRAG  
**Lure of the Lost**



**A Contemporary Pilgrimage: Walking from Huntly to Venice**

ANTHONY SCHRAG

# Lure of the Lost

A Contemporary Pilgrimage:  
Walking from Huntly to Venice

ISBN: 978-1-907115-33-2  
Text ©: Anthony Schrag  
Images: Anthony Schrag/Stuart Armitt ([www.stuartarmitt.com](http://www.stuartarmitt.com))  
Design: MouDesign.co.uk



## The Lure of the Lost

In 2015, Deveron Arts commissioned artist Anthony Schrag to undertake a long-distance walk from our home town of Huntly in the North East of Scotland to the Venice Biennale. The Venice Biennale is widely recognised as the largest and most significant art festival in the world, and Anthony's 2657 km, 88-day walk was framed as a pilgrimage to this sacred site for many artists. By walking there, we aimed to question what it means to exhibit in such a prestigious place, and the desire of wanting to be accepted.

A pilgrimage is defined as a journey to a place of moral or spiritual significance. It maintains the human pace and is usually an enduring and reflective activity to a desired destination. Lure of the Lost took inspiration from Saint Anthony of Padua, Patron Saint of the Lost. Anthony Schrag reversed the Saint's legacy, and instead acquired a relic from each of his hosts on the pilgrimage, delivering them to Venice. This gesture mimicked one of pilgrims past; the tradition of collecting badges en route to show journey accomplishments.

Descriptions of pilgrimages – normally related to religion - date back to the 4th Century. One of those was the Via Francigena, an ancient pilgrim route to Rome. Anthony used established paths such as this one, stitching them into the unique line created for this project. The route starts in our little Aberdeenshire town, leads over the Cairngorm mountains to the borders of England to link with the Pennine Way. Past London it picks up the Francigena at Canterbury, crosses to France at Dover and walks down to the Swiss alps. After the Aosta valley it diverts along the Po valley to Padua, allowing a visit to St Anthony's Basilica a few days before arriving in Venice.

The project sparked many more things beyond what it means to want to go to the Venice Biennale. These include; the lone journey, what it means to be a host, obstacles in the landscape, the privilege of easy border crossing, and the creation of community through association. And above all, can a walk, can this walk be an art work?

Anthony reached the Biennale gates on 1st October 2015. The line created between Huntly and Venice by walking, became populated with a large number of people, events and ideas, which surpassed the desire of destination. During his journey, Anthony walked with over 100 people, stayed in over 80 different beds, was hosted by many, many families, communities and individuals. He wrote a daily blog, which had 13,000 visitors, from over 30 countries. He gave talks on the route and shared meals, laughter and pain. This book is a documentation of that walk, linking those many people and places together. It also functions as a guide for others wishing to trace a route to the Venice Biennale.

The path documented here is the route that Anthony took to be lost, and to be found. We encourage you to find your own path between these sites, as Anthony did. In that way, it becomes your path too.

**Deveron Arts, 2016**

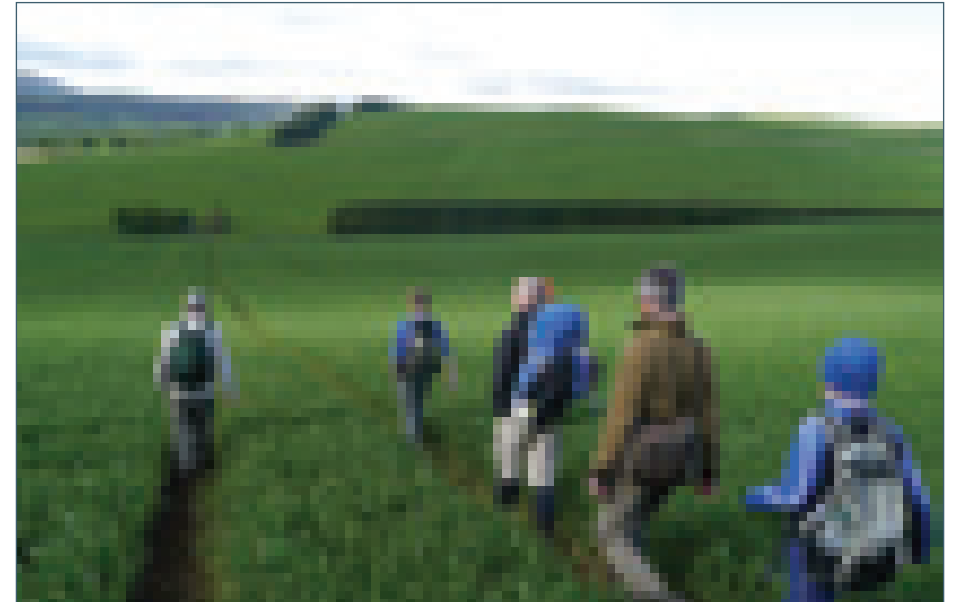
## Section 1: Huntly to Edinburgh



### Day 1: Huntly to Glenkindie

42 km | 10 hours | 42 km in total | Pam and Keith Cockburn

Start at Huntly Town Square, head south over the Clashmach, skirt the Clashindarroch, enter Rhynie around lunchtime, aim towards the western edge of the Cairngorms, skirting the Cabrach, down into Glenkindie. Look out for Gill flying a kite so you know which direction to head.



Last night, 'Saint Anthony's Feast' was held in the traditional style with St Antonio of Padua cakes and pilgrimage icons and imagery. I was feted and celebrated as the Town's Saint, carried around the square like a Madonna. The party was busy and in the morning I wake with excitement.

I leave Pam and Keith's musical house, walk to the square and seems like a whole town joins in to send me off and to walk the first half-day – 20 km to Rhynie. But the excitement is tempered by fear and a sudden realisation of what this whole, massive endeavour might entail. The distance and the dangerous possibilities of such a path: how will I be lost and how will I be found?! How dangerous? What could happen? Iain, my husband, is worried and I can tell from the way he grinds his teeth.

Deveron Arts has some oak saplings in their garden, all grown from acorns picked from oak trees planted by Joseph Beuys. Just before I leave, I decide to take one of them with me, wrapped in wet newspaper and plastic. It pokes its new leaves out of my backpack's side pocket, ready and waiting. I like the idea of taking the tree as homage to Beuys, and as a link to his legacy in participatory, social artworks. I also need to keep safe so the tree stays alive. It has become a baby I need to care for. The

Big Red Stick feels strong in my hand, and we leave the town early in the morning.

We stop at the top of the Clashmach hill and look back: my last view of Huntly, and 111 days ahead of me to Venice. All I have to do is walk across a continent and over the Alps.

As we turn away from the town and south, down the hill, Clyde, the son of a friend, walks in front of me, down a path in a green and growing field. At some point he begins to run – fast and energetic and alive and vital: He is a river suddenly in the wrong place – downhill, rushing, tracing the furrow, gracing and pulsating with the force of life. He is so full of youth and possibilities, on the edge of life and manhood and everything... and I feel suddenly very, very old and fragile. I turn to my friend and say: *This is the image I will remember throughout the rest of the walk.*

Portishead – *Wandering Star*

## Day 2: Glenkindie to Glenmuick

41 km | 10 hours | 83 km in total | Gill and Chris Russell

Leave Glenkindie in the bright summer morning, and trace the moors over to Tillypronie, to Migvie and into the Cambus O'May. Lean towards – and through – Ballater and climb slowly and steadily to the Spittal of Glenmuick.

My first night was endlessly interrupted by both twitching, tired legs and the reality of the project seeping into my sleep. In the morning, I wake up sore, everywhere. The artist Gill Russell and I speak slowly and quietly over tea and breakfast. She takes a look at my map, frowns and then turns on her computer, opening up her own mapping

programme. She adjusts my route so it's easier, so I climb over fewer hills. She hands me back my maps and a white feather that her partner brought all the way from St Kilda: the loneliest rock in the world. She asks me to take the feather to Venice for her. It is the first of my 'relics' that I will gather from each and every host along the way. I am glad the first one is light. As I pack it into my notebook, I think: *it feels good having something to be lonely with.*

Gill walks with me for an hour, walks with me to the edge of a stream and I step over it and she stays on the other side, and I suddenly feel very alone. We part ways without looking back.

Today, I have ten hours of walking: this is already the longest I've ever walked in my life.

As I near the Spittal of Glenmuick, it starts to trickle with rain, and my mood plummets. My misery is interrupted by Anna, James and their daughter who walk with me to my



campsite for the night: a quiet hill with some rushing water by a Loch. They have brought me fresh eggs and chocolate. They help me arrange my tent, make jokes and look at my blisters. They help me go through my pack and remove all the things I thought I needed, but don't, and are just weighing me down. I feel a bit braver as they leave me and walk back to their car, and then the sun goes down and I go to sleep in the quiet wilderness, the small light of my torch the only light below the cloudless sky.

Lemon Jelly – *Wandering Man*

## Day 3: Glenmuick to Kilry

35 km | 13 hours | 116 km in total | Camping by Loch Muick

Pack up your camp early, and follow the one lonely double-track road south towards Glendoll. Up from there to the Kilbo Path, and down again into the head of Glen Clova. Up again and down the other side, through the woods parallel to the Blackwater Reservoir, into Kilry at the end of a very long day. The green tarpaulin on the roof of your host's house is like a warm and welcoming beacon to your tired feet.



Clouds are down low. Not raining, but pulled right tight down to the ground like a tablecloth over the visible peaks of the Cairngorms. Today, I have three big hills to climb with a rise and fall of over 1000 m. At the top of the second giant climb, near the mountain called Mayar, the clouds descend and I am lost as my small path disappears into the cloud in front of me.

Behind me I see little else except white: all around is white.

My GPS isn't working. My map says I should be going downhill, but I find myself scrambling up steep rocks and loose scree. I stand for a moment, in the silence, looking around. I am utterly alone, no one knows where I am, in the middle of nowhere and I cannot find my path. I say to myself, out loud: *This is how people die*, and wonder what I should do. Crying seems an option.

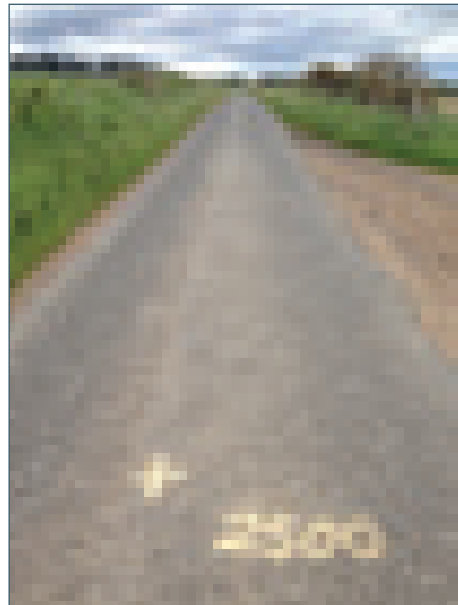
Suddenly, out of the white, a gentleman with a giant, grey handlebar moustache comes striding towards me. I flag him down and explain my situation. He points me in the right direction, says: *You'll be down in no time!* and then disappears back into the fog. I spend the rest of the afternoon wondering if I really met him, or if he was a ghost: my spirit guide nudging me towards life.

Near the afternoon, I enter a wooded area where all the trees have fallen down and blocked my path. I do not know which way to go, so I walk next to – and in – the stream for another 4 hours until I find the path again. I am wet, tired and cold. Eventually, I find my host's house, find a way in through gaggles of geese and hens and other birds to the front door and the hidden key I know is in a boot. Inside, I find a bottle of wine with the word *enjoy* on a note next to it, but, instead, I collapse, shake with shock and then sleep. Outside, I hear the birds moving gently around the grass.

Johnny Cash – *I Walk The Line*

#### Day 4: Kilry to Perth

40 km | 11 hours | 158 km in total | Kirsty Duncan



Head south, between Bamff and Alyth, towards Blairgowrie, using farm-roads and single-track dirt lanes. At Blairgowrie, get lunch and turn left toward Coupar-Angus, then right toward Wolfhill. From Wolfhill, aim southwest, through Scone and into Perth, limping as you go.

In the morning, I wake up to the clucking chickens and geese. I had been so exhausted the night before, I'd not noticed how beautiful Kirsty's converted barn is. I groggily look around at the converted loft, the comfortable size, the pleasant smell and shape of their living room. I remind myself that I cannot lay about like this forever, and that there is walking to be done. I force myself to get up, force my body upright, despite the aches, and force myself to swing my legs to the floor. I stand and am met with screaming, shooting, excruciating pain.

Blisters.

Blisters that have expanded and grown in the night, making my whole foot angry with pain. My whole body is felt in that throbbing

I do not think, but hobble to my backpack, find my penknife and then perform minor surgery on my feet, cutting blisters off entirely, catching the clear liquid with toilet paper. I am shocked at how clinical I can be when necessary: how different three days of walking has already made me. How much more will I change? I have not thought of art since I left Huntly and seem to live entirely through my body. There is no time to think or reflect – only to walk and walk and walk. The body is all that matters, and all my strength is focused on keeping it moving.

The paths today are a blur and I am just thankful for the lack of hills. At one point, graffiti on the road reads *+2500 km* – the same distance from Huntly to Venice – and I realise that I have begun to read auguries in everything I see and hear: the silence and loneliness of the past few days has struck a chord of concern in my usually social brain. I talk to every bird I see flying past. I arrive at Kate and Yunior's cosy house and limp slowly up their stairs: there is a glass of wine and an excellent meal and a soft, soft bed. I feel completely cared for, and am so very, very thankful.

Sonic Youth – *Walking Blue*

#### Day 5: Perth to Falkland

26 km | 6 hours | 184km in total | Kate and Yunior Sargent-Aguilar

Perth to Bridge of Earn, to Glenfoot, and up a hill, turning towards Auchtermuchty, and then down to Falkland. Lots of motorways, so be careful.



Lise Olsen walks with me today – one in a series of walking companions who are, for lack of a better word, complete strangers.

She is a sprightly woman, with questioning and querying eyes. She arrives early, with backpack and walking shoes at the ready, and with 30 questions about art and walking. We trace roads rather than paths, and stop for a bacon roll at a farm-shop. As we walk, she charges me with making intelligent responses, while blistered and tired. I do my best, but one can only hope that she takes my responses with a grain of (exhausted) salt. I think she does and we have some laughs and avoid getting run over by trucks.

It is certainly more enjoyable having someone with whom to share a lunch and with whom to walk throughout the day, to talk and blether about art, about life, about why I'm doing this funny project. I realise how alone I have been.

One of her questions that sticks in my mind grew out of a discussion we had about 'value'. We all have filters to view the world that obscure and reveal our value systems, and I wonder with this walk – while it is intended to exist as something of an 'inquiry' into the Venice Biennale – am I actually emphasising the importance of the site by expending so much energy to get there? In other words: if it isn't so important, why am I making such an effort?

ESG – *Keep On Moving*

## Day 6: Falkland to Burntisland

31 km | 7 hours | 215 km in total | Sue and Keith Allan

Falkland lies in the round shadow of the East Lomond Hills: skirt around the west of the tallest hill, staying west of Glenrothes, and down into Cardenden. Cross the motorway



and pause at the first sighting of Arthur's Seat, over towards Edinburgh. Keep heading south, through Auchtertool, finding old cycle paths that take you over The Binn and into Burntisland.

The blisters are healing. Last night, Joss delivered me some sandals to ease the pain as I walk. As I set off today, I realise I have become everything I hate: a man wearing sandals and socks!

In the morning, I walk with Joss' dad, Keith, to the base of the Lomond Hills and he and I enjoy the quiet morning and the bird song. He tells me about walking in these hills. I leave him with a hug and eternal gratitude for hosting me so well. As I climb the side of the outcrop, in the distance, I see Arthur's Seat – the hill under which I normally live. I have now had a week without living in its shadow, and instead, I've been living in the shadow of my backpack, and the spindly leaves of The Oak Sapling. Seeing the hill is bittersweet, because it means that I will soon be home, to my man, to my things and to my life... but it also means that I will soon, too, be leaving it again. Thinking about it leaves me bleak.

But then my telephone rings, and three times today, beautiful people call to wish me well and to ask about how I am doing, and how I am coping... it reminds me that people are wonderful, and this socially engaged practice of mine is based in the hearts of people, and not in the performative suffering of this walk/performance. It's only been six days, but already five families have held me dear and it makes the world quite beautiful. I arrive at Caroline's house at 5pm on the dot. She is the mother of a good friend of mine, David, and is also a retired nurse: she opens the door and promptly demands to see to my blisters, suggests the best way to care for them and runs a bath for me. She makes me hearty soup and bread, and sits in front of the TV, to watch the tennis. I almost fall asleep into the soup, smiling.

Eurythmics – *The Walk*

## Day 7: Burntisland to Edinburgh

38 km | 10 hours | 251 km in total | Caroline Stephenson

Follow the water west until the Forth Road Bridge, cross the Firth of Forth (with friends), and turn east towards Edinburgh. Wend way through city, along the side of motorways until collapsing, quite exhausted.

My feet are aches of flesh, oozing clear liquid.

My legs are fire and my knee joints jar.

The backpack is every difficult thing, strapped to my back.

The bloody Stick is unwieldy and annoying: why on earth did I agree to take it?

The Oak, at least, is alive and well, and that keeps me focused, as I set off.

Today, I am walking towards my home. My friend, David, joins me. We have planned to meet Stuart – the filmmaker – and my husband, Iain, in Inverkeithing by the train station. When I arrive, I hold on to Iain for as long as I can before we walk towards the Forth Road Bridge. There, I meet other people and friends wishing to walk alongside me. We walk over the bridge together, and I feel bolstered by their energy. At the other end of the bridge, Sam Ainsley and David Harding – my artistic mentors – wait



with a cheer and a rousing speech. They have driven from Glasgow, just for this brief cheering-on. I am, again, buoyed by the goodness of people. We all live through our body as we track our way through the city – the first time in seven days that I am surrounded by people – and I arrive exhausted, bittersweet, so happy to be home but knowing I must leave after a short rest. The reality of tracing this path comes back to me, but, despite it all, I still feel excited – who will meet me next? How will I continue getting lost?

Mark Lanegan + Isobel Campbell – *(Do You Wanna) Come Walk With Me*



## Section 2: Edinburgh to Slaley Hall





## Day 8: Edinburgh to Peebles

41 km | 9 hours | 293 km in total | Home

Start at Saint Anthony's Chapel Ruins, and walk through the Middle Path of Arthur's Seat park. Find the A701 and follow the sidewalk path to cross over the City Bypass, leaving Edinburgh. Wiggle through Loanhead and find Rosslyn Chapel nestled in its ancient valley. Heading almost due south following bits of old railway line that goes through Mount Lothian and Spurlens Rig, the mud squelching into your toes. Lose and then find that railway line again, parallel to the river as you go through Eddleston and Redscarhead, then into Peebles.



It is hard to leave the comfort of my home, but I soon discover the excitement of the road again. I walk with my Tall Friend Twigg all the way to Peebles, and as he counts out the beats of his stanzas and the rhymes of his poetry, I count the steps my feet make. I tell him that I want to have a record of how many gates I walk through, and he mulls on that a while and then smiles in response.

We talk art and walking and I tell him that I don't feel like the walking – the physical steps of one foot in front of another – feels like art: to me, it is our exchanges, our conversations, and our thoughts that hold the 'art'. There is art in the ways we are connected, both by a line but also, by the time we spend together. He says he thinks of the physical action of walking like a background colour in a painting: it is the thing that gives meaning to the focus of attention. I do not disagree.

Our path leads through soggy bogs and hard-packed ground. It almost rains, but we escape and race quickly towards the end.

Peebles and Eastgate Theatre and Arts Centre welcome us into their open arms. We talk and rejoice and it feels good to be walking forward again, walking south, sans blisters, sans pain.

Bill Doggett – *Slow Walk*

## Day 9: Peebles to Selkirk

34 km | 8 hours | 328 km in total | Caroline Adam / Eastgate Arts

Avoid the hills in favour of flatter, valley floor. Cycle routes along the B-roads are easier on the feet than the high hills. Follow the river east, on the south side, bending into

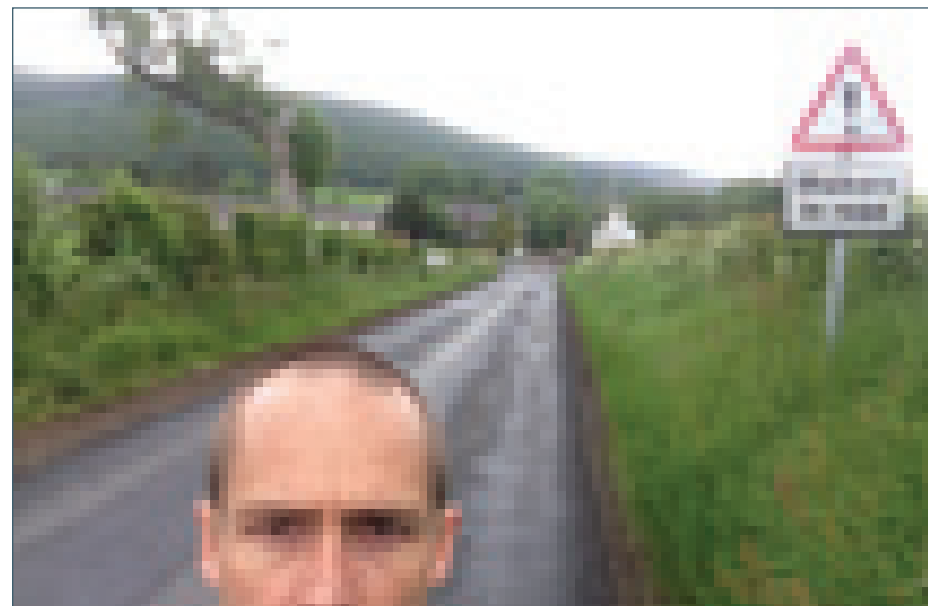
Traquair, then skirting Walkerburn, Thornylee, and Caddonfoot. After that, run parallel to motorway on muddy paths that curve south into the Selkirk Valley. Walk to bridge and cut up again into the heights of Selkirk town itself.

I walk along the bike paths instead of along the mountain paths that had been originally planned. This feels better. The valleys are full of people and life and activity: the hill paths are beautiful, yes, but much, much lonelier.

I am, perhaps, learning how to cope with the exhaustion better, and so I begin to think about things other than my body's pain. Thinking about the notion of Saint Anthony and the idea of a 'pilgrimage' to Venice, seems to be wrapped up with complicated notions of faith and value: things that always have to be negotiated. I was not raised to a religious family and have lacked the knowledge of such organised belief systems. I suppose I've always been drawn to the Sufi approach of religion that proposes a personal, inquiring, relationship between oneself and one's 'God' – rather than an organisational and hierarchical relationship. In such a way, I cannot deny that the art system (represented at its best and worst by the Venice Biennale) occupies the role of the deity...

These thoughts resonate through a big chat I have with the nice Eastgate Arts folks later in the evening, about The Scottish Borders becoming a 'site of pilgrimage' for the arts and creative industries, and of background machinations that need to occur in order for 'art' to happen. The myth of an artist working alone with his/her special genius is a long lost one. Creativity is an interconnected beast, and such beasts need connections to survive. I am beginning to recognise how true that is with this walk, too. Caroline and I talk of this in the car back to her quite home in the hills, and I struggle to keep awake.

Roy Orbison – *Walk On*





## Day 10: Selkirk to Hawick

22 km | 6 hours | 350 km in total | Caroline Adam / Eastgate Arts

Head south West from Selkirk town, to the West of Haining Loch, follow farm roads parallel to Hartwood Burn, until meeting the Borders Abbeys Way. Follow this through Woll Rig as it bends south east. Cross into a golf course after Woll and as you cross the road and river, go straight onwards and upwards into Ashkirk Hill. From there, head almost due south, between Drinkstone and West Broomraw into Hawick on Borders Abbeys Way.



Today, waiting to set-off from Selkirk, a man stops me and asks: *Are you the man from the telly?* He says that he recognises me by my stick (The Damned Stick!) and asks me how the walk is going. We talk about walking and the project and he tells me that he also likes walking, but only up to 20 miles a day. I tell him how impressive that is, and he smiles and says: *we walk for half the year and play bowls for the other half.* I note that they sound like complimentary hobbies, and he agrees. Then the writer, Susan Mansfield, joins me and we saunter over the hills, talking art, poetry, meaning and spirituality. I wonder if the walk will ever amount to any answers to my questions about art and the place of something like Venice, or just provide more and more questions. We both assume the latter and I sigh, knowing I have more questions to explore.

Near the end of the walk, Susan and I find a young sheep with its head trapped in a fence. I wrestle with it, yanking and trying to pull it backwards, bending the wire as much as I can. The sheep, panicking and scared, just wants to run away. This instinct, ironically, causes the sheep to push forward, pushing further into the fence. It does not realise that in order to pull its head out of the fence, it needs to go backwards. Both Susan and I struggle and wrestle with it until we both manage to pull it free in a sudden, ungraceful action. It does not stop to thank us, but runs away to join the herd. I can't help but think of it as an augury: in order to go forwards, one must go backwards. I do not know how this applies to me now, on this long journey, other than to just go forward, one step at a time.

Queens Of The Stoneage – *Walkin' On Sidewalks*

## Day 11: Hawick to Byrness

5 km | 8.5 hours | 385 km in total | Claire Pencak

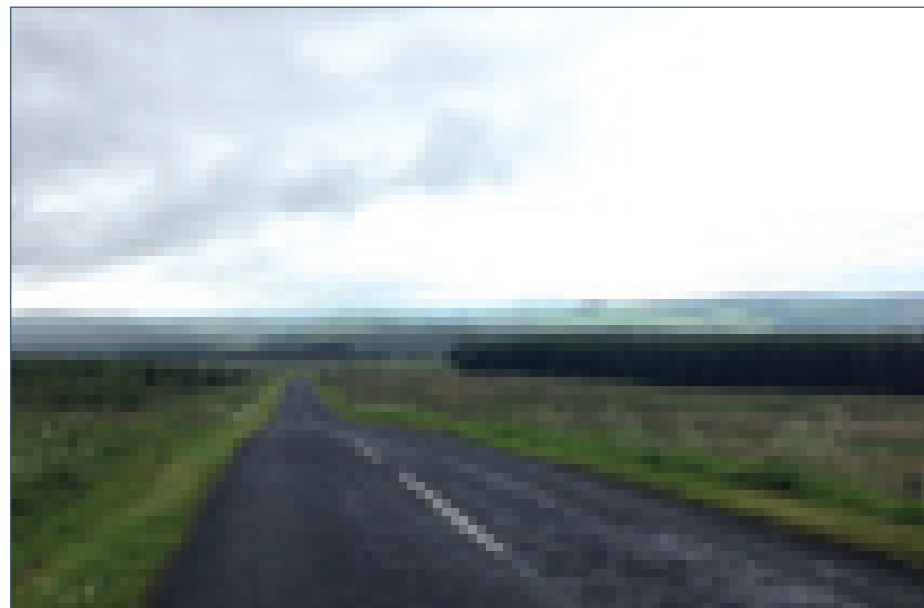
Prepare for a day on roads, as the most effective way to walk is to head east of Hawick, turning south towards Cauldmill, following the A6088 through Bonchester Bridge, skirting south around Bonchester Hill, heading up into Southdean, towards Carter's Bar at the border between Scotland and England. Follow the motorway, carefully, down and along the edge of Catcleugh Reservoir, into Byrness Village.

Claire, an artist with many talents, drops me off with a vial of water from the source of the River Tweed: She wants me to take it to Venice and mix it into the water of the Grand Canal. She tells me that some of the water in rivers has been there for 300 years, resting in quiet, dark parts of potholes and river crevasses. Some of it is fresh as the rain, but we need to think of it as something more complicated, as a 'body of water'. In some ways, this makes poetic sense to the whole of this project: some of the conversations I have been having have been going on for my entire life, and some are as new as the wet grass.

Karen Gabbittas – an artist I know from Edinburgh – joins me for a bit and we head for the Scotland/England border. We agree to have lunch in England, and that sounds like a suitably odd plan to have.

At the edge of Scotland, I turn back and look north and I feel strange: It seems like it should have taken much much longer to leave my adopted country. How has it only been ten days? Then I realise that those ten days have been so, so difficult. Each day a trial and each day a joy.

The days have been a cross-fader, blending the stern Aberdeenshire lands, into the



stark Cairngorm cliffs, into the gentle Perth and Fife hills, to Edinburgh's stones and the Border's rolling, wooded places. I'm not sure travelling by car or train or plane or even bike has the same effect. And it has not just been the landscape: the cultures have cross-faded too, mixing and combining like different coloured liquids. As I enter Englandshire – more uncommon territory to me – I wonder what will blend together as I merge with this new landscape and people.

The 5, 6, 7, 8's – *I Walk Like Jayne Mansfield*

## Day 12: Byrness to Wark

31 km | 6 hours | 416 km in total | Forest View Inn Hostel

Meeting up with the Pennine Way at Cottonshopeburnfoot Campgrounds, head south through the forests using the logging roads, towards Highgreen Manor. Veer around Manor, and keep following trail into Bellingham, crossing River North Tyne. Continue using Pennine Way into Wark.

Near the end of my short-ish walk, in Wark I meet three cheeky boys who tell me how to get to the river (I want to put my hot feet into the cool Tyne), but instead of walking to the water, I am distracted by a cup of tea. While sitting outside a small cafe, I accidentally meet my amazing hosts for the night – Peter and Fransje – who welcome me with such warmth, I feel instantly at home. I leave The Stick outside their door (opposite the tea shop) as I have done at every host's house, and sit in their garden, talking politics, hitchhiking, trust, and the need for more hospitality in the world. It is, we agree, only through meeting people who are not ourselves, who have different truths



and different narratives, that we can find out more about life in general.

And then we discover The Stick has been stolen! They are mortified, but I laugh, because it has been such a burden, I am almost glad it is gone.

Peter comes up with the idea that, if we find it – if it shows up days later – The Stick should travel under its own power. I could carve a note or something into it, asking to help get The Stick to Venice by October 1st. It could pass from person to person, by car or by walking or any other means, having a parallel journey to me. I like the idea and I am not worried about finding it in the least.

But Peter goes into the village to ask if anyone has seen it, and Fransje posts on the Wark village social media page and suddenly, the village is a frenzy of activity. Peter goes out and then returns with The Stick in both hands, having found some cheeky boys who had thrown it up into a tree for a lark.

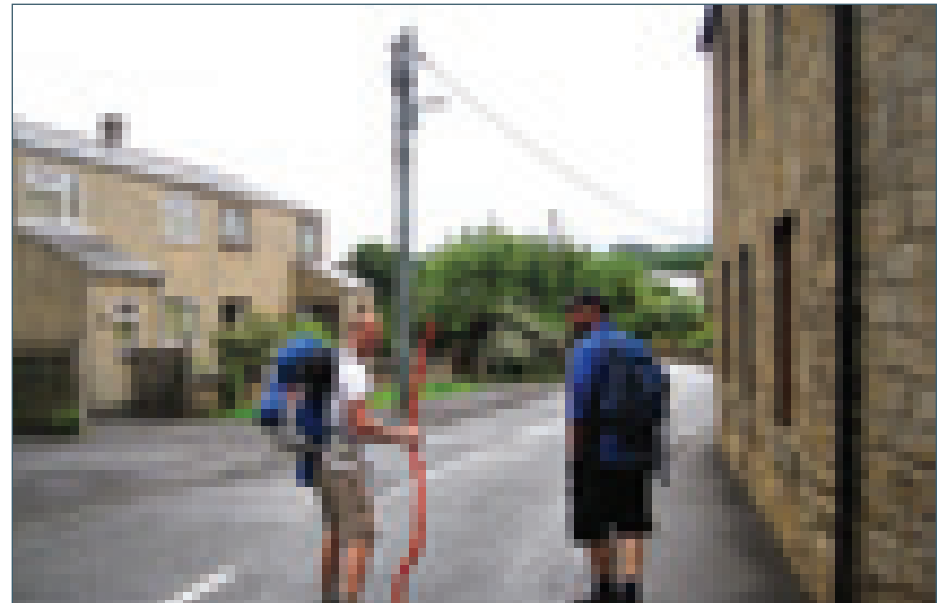
It reminds me that things return. Including me. The question, I suppose, is where would I return to, and who would I be once I got there?

MIA – *Come Walk With Me*

## Day 13: Wark to Slaley Hall

31 km | 7 hours | 447 km in total | Peter and Fransje Samsom

South towards Simonburn, using old Pennine Way routes, to Hadrian's Wall. Cross the wall at Carrawburgh Roman Camp. Meet the South Tyne River and wiggle way through Forestones and Bridge End into Hexham. South crossing between Juniper and Newbiggin, crossing Devil's Water. Follow B3606 until Slaley.



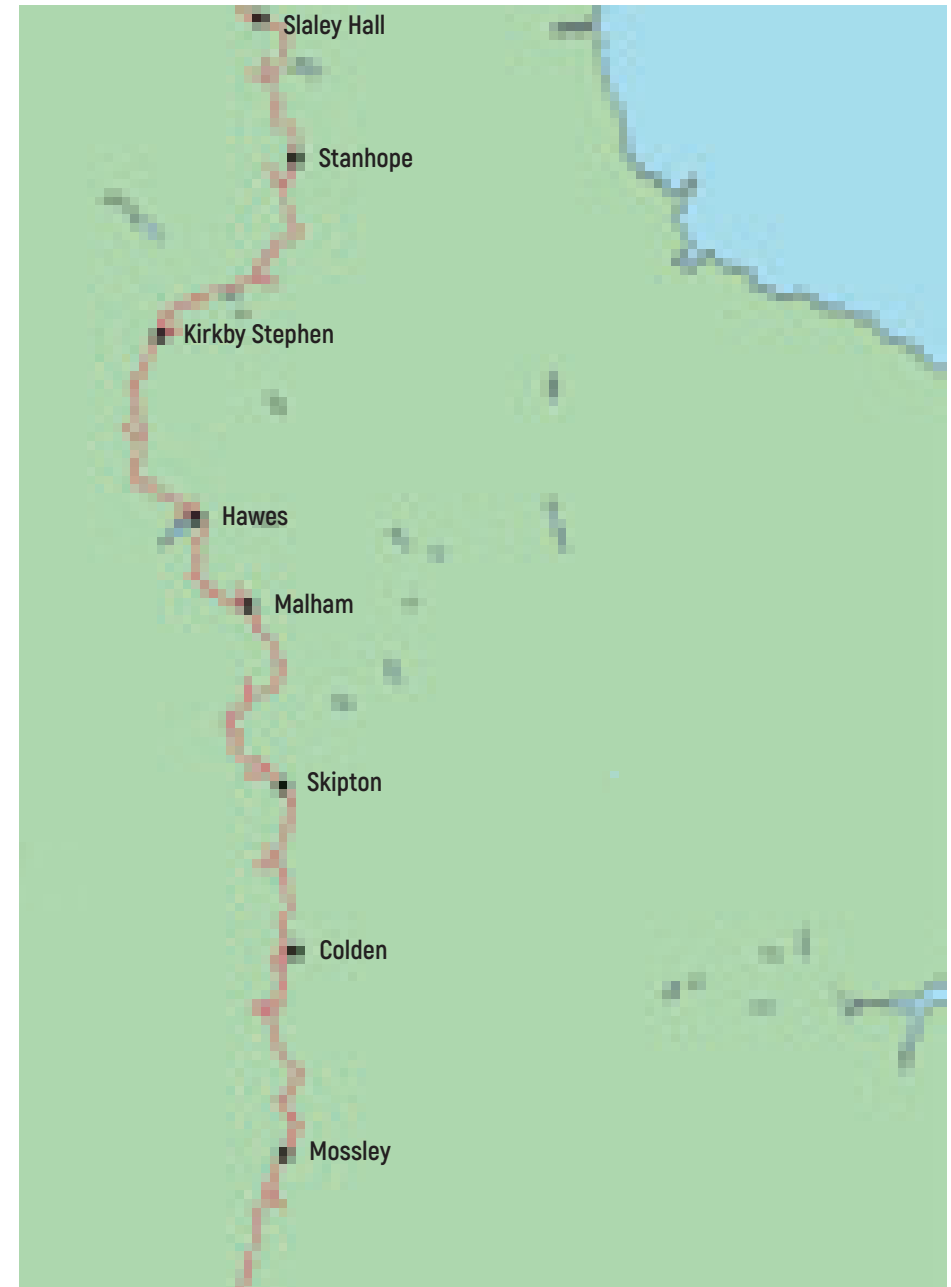
Peter walks with me for the first 10 km, and we discuss land use and land rights; the power of access to land; and the layers of politics that embed itself into the ground on which we walk. We talk about the layers of maps – the social, the agricultural, the historical, the political – that are built up in recording what happens to portions of our earth.

Maps speak of human-ness, we agree, and I think about the way I've wandered from the deer-infested heather of the Highlands, and how that landscape is in the service of a certain kind of class (grouse-shooting and mink stoles for upper-class folk). I wonder if the wet grass of farmland that I tramp through now really serves a different type of people? Both are rich landowners, only the land-use is different. We compare the different way we access land and speak about the Scottish notion of a 'Right to Roam', over a landscape with the English notion of public footpaths. How do those differences affect how we relate to the world around us? Yes, the land still belongs to land owners – the stately farms and privately enclosed lands – but having the ability to walk, wherever one wants, is different from only being allowed to walk a small path. I wonder if we just have an illusion of freedom and access. Perhaps it is better here in England, where the ownership is more blatant. What will it be like in France, in another culture altogether?

Peter leaves me and I walk on for another three hours. Eventually, I stop at a pub to rest and overhear two farmers conversing: *There's something going on around here, like. Walking with my lady and there was a gypsy wedding in the town hall the day before. We come across a deer hide hanging from a tree. It had been bled somewhere else, like, and it was just the skin hanging, like. That's naughty. Just the skin. We saw lurchers and dogs like that, all following a man with a gun on a horse. There's something going on around here.*

Cat Power – *Paths of Victory*

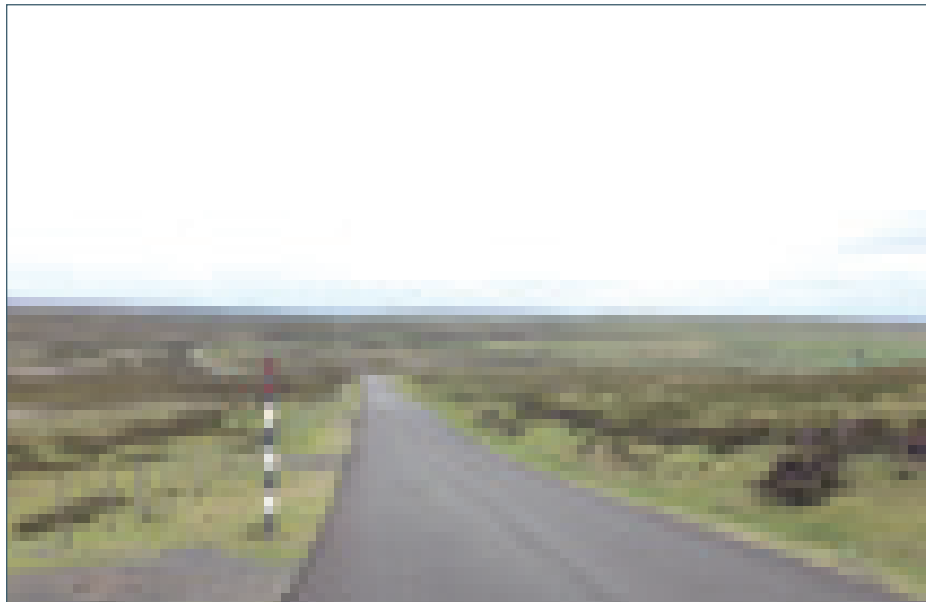
### Section 3: Slaley Hall to Mossley



## Day 14: Slaley Hall to Stanhope

23 km | 4.5 hours | 470 km in total | Frances Rowe and David Edwick

South through Slaley Hall Golf Course, along the eastern edge of Slaley Forest, then south west towards Blanchard to cross the rivers from the Derwent Reservoir. Follow Meadowbank Edge to Crawleyside and into Stanhope.



Last night's hosts – Fran, David and young William – set me to rights with a beer in their sunny garden, a delicious meal and a big soft bed. Fran and I know each other from another world (university worlds!) but on seeing her name on my hosting list, I had not made the connection that it was actually her. All the names of the people I have been hosted by, or will be hosted by, blur into one. I am pleasantly surprised to be picked up by someone who I recognise! A wonderful meal and a great series of conversations lull me to a night of dreamless, solid sleep. I wake to breakfast and discussions about art, place and meaning.

David drives me to the stop-off point from yesterday's walk and I tell him that I am humbled by the generosity of hosts, and I feel as though I should repay them, somehow. Taking a small token of theirs to the Venice Biennale seems so insignificant in comparison to the warmth of welcome, but David says that picking me up, brushing me down and setting me on my way is part of the repayment, part of the project. It's true: I am beginning to realise that the walkers who join me, the people who host, those that are directly involved somehow, are the 'collaborators' of this project... and everyone else is the 'audience'. The difficult question of who this artwork is for, is possibly shaping up to be people like Fran and David and Peter and Fransje and

Caroline and Karen and Lise and Kate and Yuniar and Claire and Gill and everyone else who holds me safe as I go. It's for folks like them that I feel I must complete my journey; that I want to complete the journey. And there are so many more people to meet. This is exciting. So, I wave to David as he drives away and I energetically set off over the moors and scare a few grouse. Nesting birds call out and rabbits move slowly behind a tuft of grass, certain they've not been seen. The sheep chew on, watching me as I walk. I find tufts of their hair on a fence and keep my idle fingers busy by spinning some makeshift wool.

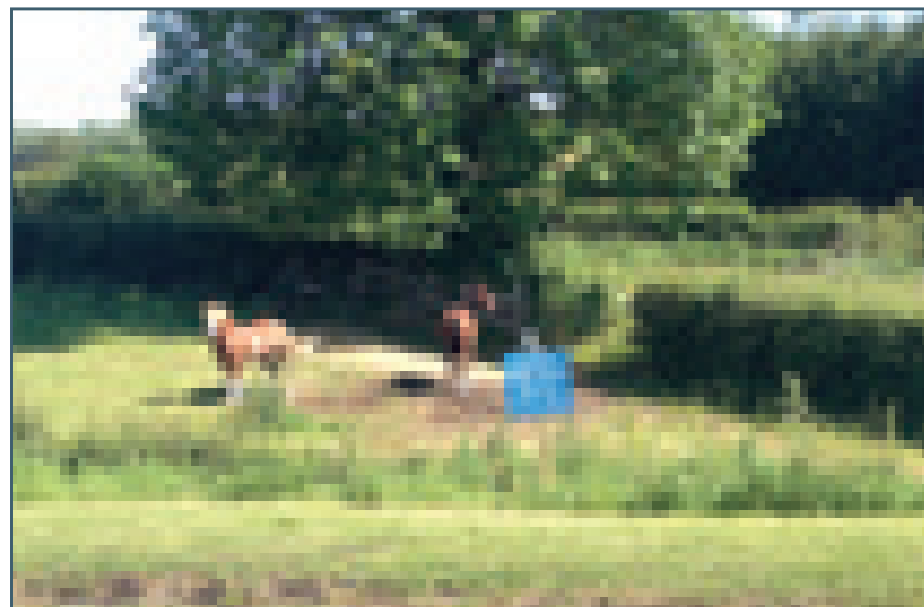
At the top of the hill, I stumble onto a long-empty champagne bottle, two broken plastic glasses and the remnants of a small party or celebration. Perhaps it is the detritus of a bunch of teenagers, but – more likely – it has been left by a pair of lovers frolicking in the romantic stillness and remoteness that only a moor can offer. I smile at their romantic evening and walk on. A few steps later, a pair of boxer shorts and a bra hanging lazily over a barbed-wire fence seems to confirm this. It feels like a joyful sort of day.

*Yard Birds – Stroll On*

## Day 15: Stanhope to Kirkby Stephen

48 km | 11.5 hours | 518 km in total | Alistair and Yan Yan Gardner

Follow B6278, until you can veer towards Middleton-in-Teesdale. Cross the River Tees, and follow road through Thringarth and Grassholme, parallel to reservoirs, and then the lonely B6276 across the Stainmore Common, turning south into Brough. Pick up A-road through Brough Sowerby and veer into Winton, then down into Kirkby Stephen.



Back on my feet after two days of rest, and my legs are like horses, aching to get moving again. I practically gallop out the door and am reminded that I joked to the commissioners of this project that I would complete the journey on a horse, if I found one. Instead, I force myself to slow, to walk sturdily and steadily. I hydrate with gulps of water every hour, trying not to drink every last drop in one go. In the hot sun of the English summer, the landscape hazes blue. I walk past some sheep when I pass into Cumbria and wonder: *do sheep have accents?* The thought is surreal enough to keep me giggling for at least an hour. Perhaps all this alone-ness is not good for me. I rummage through the conversations I've been having to keep me focused and I remember my partner saying to me: *The Venice Biennale is not about art, but about a market.* Does that make the Biennale a trade show for Art? Is that good or bad, or does it matter?

As I am thinking about this, I come across two horses in a field. They are skittish but fearless: one moving testily away, while the other picks up its hooves at me, challenging. Their paddock seems too small for such big and energetic beasts. I notice the sign in front of them that says: *Two horses for sale. Broke to ride and drive.* I am caught by a thought that is difficult to verbalise and not wholly correct. The thought has something to do with what the Venice Biennale is to the people selling these fine, angry and complicated creatures – and to the creatures themselves. Does the Venice Biennale matter to them? Should it? Should I go to them and talk to them about it? If I could afford it, would I buy a horse and explain to them that I would ride it to Venice, and explain why? Would they care? Should they?

In some ways, I realise that some might see a similar situation to these horses for sale and the role of art within the Venice Biennale. Both are wild, untamed and beautiful things that have minds and purposes of their own, but are placed in a predictable, structured commercial system. And sometimes, they're not happy to be so limited. I am not sure that is wholly true, but it's worth pondering.

Seasick Steve – *Keep On Keepin' On*

## Day 16: Kirkby Stephen to Hawes

29 km | 6 hours | 547km in total | Kirkby Stephen YHA

Walk south, parallel to River Eden until Mallerstang, where Eden disappears. Continue to Aisgill and veer east with the path over the moors, and up off the road at Hell Gill Beck, onto softer paths, heading south east into Mid Mossdale, crossing A684, and running parallel to that until Appersett and then into Hawes.

The lightning storms clear sometime in the early morning, and while the rain is still torrential as I leave the hostel, it eases, stops and warms. Today, the sun never shines directly, and there's a muggy hotness that is difficult to walk through. The horseflies rise and swarm and bite painfully. Smacking one with my map leaves a bloody mess on my arm, but the grass is still wet enough to wash away any remains.

I see a mole, and he wiggles away from me, eventually hiding his head in the ground, but leaving his smooth body exposed enough for me to gently touch him. Several nesting birds call overhead as I walk, warning. In a farm, a chicken and five chicks parade quickly past and then go quiet behind a wall. Other animals show themselves



and hide themselves all day, their young peeking up or hiding behind them.

I weave across fields, picking up paths and then losing them again in the long grass. The path literally appears and disappears in front of my feet, as if there are certain parts of the landscape that walkers have all tacitly agreed are the 'right way'. A critical mass of feet has created a smooth walk-able path, and then at other times, they have dissipated, separated, and walked their own way: their solitary steps not enough to tramp down the grass into anything lasting.

The day is quiet with the wet heat and I meet only a few walkers, each one of them seem content to quietly walk their own path. The two walkers I do speak to both assume I am on the same route as them, as if there is only one path that anyone would walk on today. And for a while, I am on the same path. And then I veer off, find my own steps in the damp, long grass, step quietly away and head in my own direction.

Bangles – *Walk Like An Egyptian*

## Day 17: Hawes to Malham

40 km | 8 hours | 587 km in total | Hawes YHA

Walk south, up between Dodd Fell and Jeffrey Pot, then down into Oughtershaw, then east along the valley towards Yockenthwaite and Hubberholme. Turn south passing Starbotton and Kettlewell, then up at Kilnsey, over Kilnsey Moor and then downhill into Malham, just as the rain starts.

As I leave Hawes, a farmer stops me and asks: *where you off to today?* I point south, over some hills and say: *to Malham, but ultimately, to Venice.* He raises his eyebrows and puts his hands on his hips and says: *Venice?! I was there last week on holiday.*







*You'll have nice weather when you're there.*

We chat companionably for a few moments and then he returns to his work, his farm and his sheep – his *woolly maggots*, as he calls them – and I return to my own work. Everyone else, however, is taking the Sunday lazily. The day is full of sauntering Sunday strollers. Most of them are going in the opposite direction to me and they keep to themselves and their own paths. The few I do meet and pass, going in the same direction, seem almost offended I should overtake them: that anyone should be in such a hurry on a Sunday. I smile but get few smiles in return, except when I meet a pair of sprightly ladies celebrating their 60th year and their energy and vitality spurs me on.

As I round the corner of a valley, I hear church bells. As I get closer, the bells chime melodically, and the parishioners amble in, as lazy and relaxed as the walkers on the moors. I am tempted to join them, if only for company and a break from the already piercing 11am sunshine. But I don't. I merely pause, listen, and carry along my path.

I realise that this scene is a small metaphor for the project as a whole: the siren of the Venice Biennale sings out, gathering and calling all the devout into its hallowed halls. I am, too, drawn inside, but considering my work, perhaps all I can ever be is a stranger, watching from a distance, and then heading away, along my own path.

Jill Scott – *A Long Walk*

## Day 18: Malham to Skipton

20 km | 4 hours | 607 km in total | Malham YHA

South from Malham, towards Airton, then continue following the Pennine Way. Turn southeast at Newfield Hall, towards Eshton, then towards Flasby, then again through Crag Wood, passing Farm None-Go-Bye, then southeast into Skipton.

I meet the canals for the first time today – their still, brown waters are pleasant company: their flat, easy-to-walk banks even more pleasant to my feet, especially after yesterday's epic distances. I wave politely to the passing boats, each one of which is going in the opposite direction. I notice that about the walkers, too: like yesterday, everyone going in the opposite direction. I have met so few walking the same way as me and I am not sure if I should take this as an omen or a blessing: am I utterly alone, or am I forging an untrodden path? Am I, as my parents have said about me since I was a child, just being a contrarian: doing the opposite as everyone else just for the sake of being intentionally difficult?

Old habits, it seems, die hard.

Of the walkers I do meet, that do stop and speak with me about the project, there are two types: those that want to know *how* and those that want to know *why*. There are far, far more of the former. The question I am asked by this first group has to do with how I will walk across the water, to Europe. Rarely am I asked *why*. Perhaps that is because we culturally do not value the *why* question. Or perhaps it is just easier to know the details, not the concepts.



Early in the day, I meet a young man on the path. He seems a bit lost, perhaps distracted. He tells me he's just graduated from a History degree and doesn't know what he wants to do. He says he wants to be a gardener but isn't sure and so is spending three weeks walking and camping, to think about life. We stop a while and talk about direction, life paths and purposes. He asks me about my project, and is definitely from the *why* camp. I enjoy his probing thoughts and offer him some helpful questions on his own quest. If you ever read this, Hamish-On-The-Moor, I want you to

know that you'll be fine. Go, help things grow. There are not enough nurturing hands in the world. It's not being intentionally difficult, it's finding your own path.

Foo Fighters – *Walk*

## Day 19: Skipton to Colden

33 km | 9.5 hours | 640 km in total | Ann Rutherford

South out of Skipton, to east of Carleton, following road to go between Dale End and Cononley and then further south into Cowling. Pass over Stott Hill Moor following Pennine Way past Scar Top, and up into Top Withens Moor, curving down afterwards to the Walshaw Dean Reservoirs. Take the shorter Dean Gate path to Walshaw, crossing over to Hardcastle Crags, then to Slack, hair-pinning back on yourself to Colden.

Claudia, the Director of Deveron Arts, has joined me for two days of walking and our host from last night – Ann Rutherford from East Street Arts – walks with us for half the day, showing us the Mills and history of the landscape. Claudia and I leave her near Cowling and are alone for the rest of the day, over the wet, wet, wet, wet, wet moors, crossing from one field and through one fence to another. It is sometimes so wet and loud that Claudia and I cannot talk over the clatter of water.



Alone in my thoughts, I think to myself that I still have three months to walk and wonder how this walk will be translated to others, beyond me and those who walk with me. Passing over a border from North Yorkshire to West Yorkshire, I wonder:

Should I record how many borders I have passed through? Should I be recording all the different barriers I experience; how many gates I've opened; how many rivers I've crossed; how many fences I've climbed over? I should be marking these as documentation, as proof and translation of my experiences. But, then say aloud to the rain: *Why? A record of them will not translate the act of doing it.* I ask myself (again) where the art lies in this and I can label the aesthetic and conceptual choices: pilgrimage, walking art, linking places, etc., but I now want to know how is it *good* art? A few photographs will not sufficiently translate that.

Eventually, we pass down into more valleys, see the agricultural land open up and I notice that the wheat is still green, and while it has been raining horribly, it is still warm, and things are still doing their spring-time best to grow, rather than their summer-ripening or their autumn-closing-down. I use this thought to keep me going the last few steps.

Ella Fitzgerald – *Let's Take A Walk Around The Block*

## Day 20: Colden to Mossley

41 km | 10 hours | 681 km in total | Karen Smith

Still using Pennine Way as a base, go towards Blackshaw Head, over the old miner's paths, and curve west into Charlestown, then follow the river and road south west. Up into Mankinholes, then across Withens Moor to the west side of the Warland and White Holme Reservoirs, heading south. Cross M62. Veer west towards Denshaw, then almost due south, meeting up with canal path in Uppermill. Follow this into Mossley.

In the morning, Karen walks with us for an hour or two. We walk on beautifully made paths that she tells us were made by the endless mill workers that used to walk these routes to get to work, sometimes 7 miles a day. The walking paths through the Yorkshire Dales therefore, are a legacy of that time and it's strange to think that the Industrial Revolution actually created the routes of – what are now – the paths of rural idylls. It's a paradox not lost on me as I walk, physically exhausted and a slave to the beast of this project. Not that I am trying to equate this walk with an industrial mill or some factory, but there are (at this exhausted sixth day of walking without rest) some similarities between the monotony of machines, the tiredness in my body and the production of goods. I keep this to myself, however, and Karen leaves us and returns to the warmth and wonder of her and Matt's house. I suddenly miss her and their little converted barn and their surly-yet-lovely cat.

The wetness and the spectre of Heathcliff's presence lingers on from yesterday, and the mist today tumbles down, down like a dark Victorian foreboding. Duncan and Ruth – brilliant little sparks of light from Creative Scene – also join us for a few hours around lunchtime, but despite their incredibly bright conversations, the day lingers in quietness.

Duncan and I talk of 'audiences' and we try to unravel who this project is for. He asks if the audience are participants who walk with me, and talk and engage through hosting, and share online conversations. Or is it for someone else? Is there another set of people that receive this project, and who are they and how are they different? I realise I am not sure. Are you, the reader, the audience? Or are you a participant? Does it matter?

Duncan and Ruth leave us in the afternoon and we continue to ponder their questions. In the fog, and in some lazy map reading, however, Claudia and I get lost for the first time, as if the fog has decided to steal our direction. Not out of malice, but because it could. We spend fifty minutes traipsing through deep, wet grass, draining energy to find our way back, and in the last two hours of walking I am in automatic-step mode. I do not speak to anyone.

Oh Brother, Where Art Thou – *I am Weary, Let Me Rest*



#### Section 4: Mossley to Milton Keynes



## Day 21: Mossley to Macclesfield

38 km | 7.25 hours | 719 km in total | Jo and Andy Stratford

Follow the busy street roads south to Stalybridge, then to Hyde, meeting up with a canal that you follow until Romiley. Follow Offerton Road to Hazel Grove, then meander to Poynton, Adlington, and then Butley Town. London Road takes you to Tytherington, and then into Macclesfield.



Last night's hosts, Jo and Andy, arranged a dinner party for me and invited other artists who have done walking and/or other endurance feats. We spoke of trials of human endurance, of women who run across Africa, and men who climb ice cliffs, and people who do 100 km races over eighteen hills in less than six hours. My little walk pales in comparison to such amazing efforts. I am reminded of the Czech artist who walked to Venice in the 1960's, or the German artists (several of them) who also walked to Venice, and the multitude of other artists whose practice is based in the process of walking, endurance, grand gestures and amazing contributions to the world of art and adventure.

I do not realise how much this unsettles me until I begin the walk the next day and my simple steps on the muddy banks of the Macclesfield Canal seem insignificant. In my insecurity, I am not sure I wholly know how my current walking is different from the past projects. How it adds to something bigger, or how it contributes a new aesthetic understanding of life and/or art. Perhaps the only novel contribution comes from the collaborative, participatory side of the work: from the random conversations that develop between myself and boat-keepers, dog-walkers, teenage-lovers bunking off

school to hold hands and walk along the canal.

As I walk, I can sense the exhaustion build. My left thigh aches a bit too much as I march. My feet hurt in the heel and at my little toe. I try to keep focused and notice that I've emerged, utterly, into an urban landscape. Electricity pylons stretch across the canal and I have a view of these structures not normally seen, directly from below. Graffiti replaces sheep as the omnipresent visual trope. I try to understand how vast the world is, and how long the walk will be, even though it will only trace a small insignificant line on the map. This thought emerges in the monotony of the steps and the roar of traffic, and the trillions of blades of grass I've tramped over and the volume of breaths I've taken. Such a silent gesture as walking can be a sort of defiant act against the overwhelming sheer size of the world. To understand that and still walk must mean something, I think.

*The Impressions – I Gotta Keep Moving*

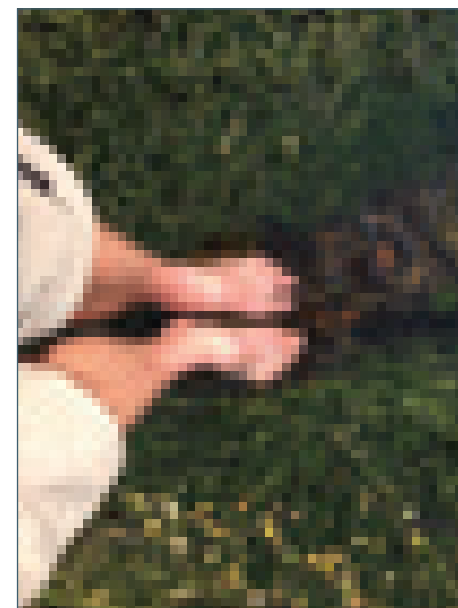
## Day 22: Macclesfield to Matlock

48 km | 12 hours | 767 km in total | Chadwick House Hotel

Follow roads to Walker Barn, then east towards Bottom-of-the-Oven. Carry on east towards Cat & Fiddle Inn, and then over Axe Edge Moor, skirting along Leap Edge all the way to Early Sterndale. Soon after, join the roads, but joining the Pennine Way again after Monyash. Follow Pennine Way into Youlgreave, and from there follow the Limestone Way as far as Winster, then the B roads into Matlock.

The day starts with me hearing two men making jokes about Scottish people. I do not know if I should be offended at the jibe towards my adopted land, or if it is just light-hearted banter between pals. The further south I go, however, I feel like I am in a different country. Of course, this makes sense, we are a nation of many millions and if one travels far enough in any direction, one will soon find culture that is different from one's own. This is a good thing.

I stop to ask a helpful and kind looking woman a question and we start to speak. She asks me about my project and seems excited and interested, but pauses, and says: *Don't go to Calais, mind. Terrible. Immigrants everywhere. They're bad news.* I often wonder why, with my strange accent, do people not associate me with 'those' immigrants? My whiteness and maleness may put me at a privilege, but I am still an immigrant. And a useless, arty immigrant, at that.





When I walk, as I do, I am even more of an immigrant. I remind myself that in medieval times, the passing pilgrim would be one of the few examples of ‘strangeness’ that any small hamlet or settlement would see. It was how news was shared; how tales travelled; how myths grew and cultures became linked. One could argue that it was only through the travellers that a country became whole.

I leave the woman behind and keep walking, almost matching pace with a couple going in the same direction as I. After a while, I begin to speak to them, and find the warmest, most welcoming people. We walk for almost two hours together and these funny, adorable and insightful people settle me. We speak about ‘concepts’ people and ‘practical’ people – they both work at rival universities, one a ‘proper’ university and one a ‘polytechnic’, and agree that, in spite of the friction between the different types of people, the world can only work at its best when different tribes work together. It strikes me that this might be true of identity too. Not just with Scottish and English, or political and personal identities, but with all things that are different from each other. French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas suggests that human beings are social creatures, and so we can only ever find out about ourselves through other people. In this sense, this walk has an imperative to expose and explore difference. It is only through that difference that we can actually come together.

Primal Scream – *Movin’ On Up*

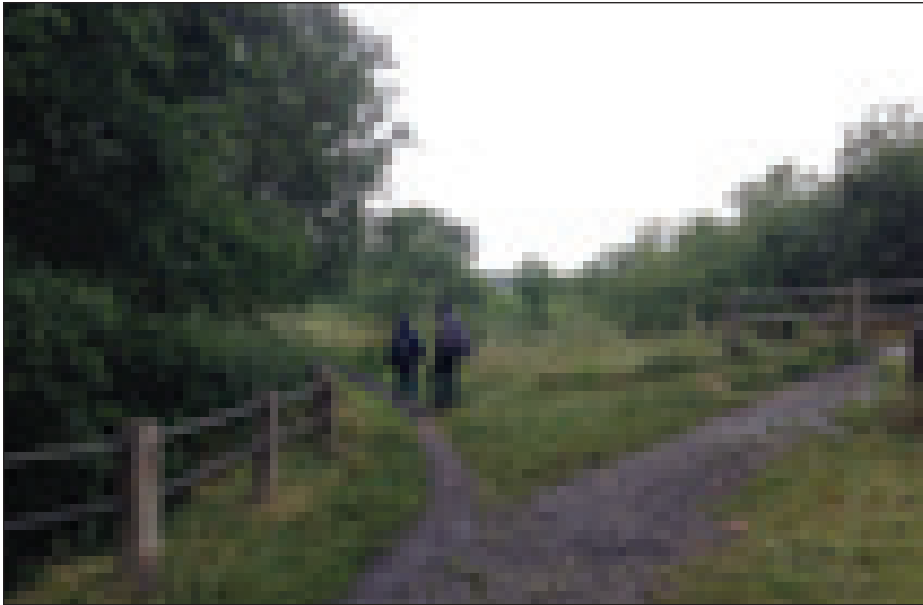
### Day 23: Matlock to Ironville

21 km | 5.5 hours | 788 km in total | Ellen House Bed and Breakfast

Climb up the Riber Hill, and follow road south of Dethick Manor, turning south at Wheatcroft, towards South Wingfield. Join path after railway before Fournal Ends, and head south to Pentrich, then over/under the A38. Pass through Butterly and join trail by canal to Ironville.

I walk most of the day with Amy and Matthew, two folks who independently contacted me and wanted to walk for distinct and separate reasons. Amy is writing her MA thesis on walking and art, and Matthew runs a theatre company in London and is interested in what walking can do in terms of art and performance. The day is filled with discussions about the place of walking in the world and where the art might reside in such a walking context.

The longest discussion point is about the place of audience within this project. I touched on this before, but I am not sure I fully explored the notion. I suppose the resonant issue is whether art needs an audience. Can we imagine an art with only participants? Walking artist Hamish Fulton’s work is mentioned throughout the day, with his emphasis that the walking ‘is’ the art and – as Amy says: *anything else is document*. This rings true with me. But, we wonder, why does he make maps or publications or other objects that linger and communicate that story? Should it not just disappear? Of course, the answer lies in the question of audience – if it was just about the process, then it would entirely be about participants but there is always a secondary or even tertiary group of people to whom we try to communicate the ideas or the experience. To paraphrase Claire Bishop: how does the work relate to you, and



me, and everyone else who didn't participate?

I suggest that Amy and Matthew are now part of this project: their insight and conversation and experience indelibly inked into the skin of it. However, when I make this publication or tell someone else about it, how/why do I do that in a way that honours and values their (and all the other's) contributions? In what way will I translate and communicate this appropriately? Amy thinks I need to trust the process and that it will become clear as I do it, the further south I go, and the more I gain my walking legs. She is probably correct.

*Soul II Soul – Keep On Moving*

## Day 24: Ironville to Loughborough

43 km | 8 hours | 831 km in total | Sally Lemsford

Meet the Canal in Ironville and follow it directly south until Trentlock (about 25 km). Veer west to cross the River Trent at Sawley. Meet up with River Soar at Ratcliffe-on-Soar, follow directly south until Loughborough.

Sally Lemsford, an artist, feeds and hosts me. She picks me up and dries me out from the wetness of the day, and sets me to rights in her wonderfully cosy home. The next morning, I wave goodbye to her in the gloom of an ominously dark Tuesday morning. Grateful to have met her, I toddle off in search of my next companion.

I meet my friend Gerrie in the glamorous parking lot of a McDonalds in Langley Mill. The last time I saw her was probably eight years ago, and while social media has kept us in touch, we have not actually seen each other for years. We hug and laugh while the morning commuters ignore us. Starting our walk, we join the Erewash Canal,

marching toward Loughborough with a litany of topics and discussion. I mention to Gerrie that I enjoy the moment in which talking falls silent during a walk, and one marches in companionable silence with a friend. She stops and warns me that she would, indeed, get quiet in the afternoon and that I shouldn't take it personally.

However, we arrive in Loughborough, eight hours later, with barely a silent moment between us, and still much to discuss. Over the day, we have talked about the place of peer-review in academia; art as research in the 21st century; the role of the market; the development of artists; the role of teachers to students; the place of art as a tool for social change (or not); politics and power in the context of the current 'Greek crisis'; the development of colleagues' careers; practicalities and experiences of long-distance-walking; the nature of walking artists; stereotypes of European cultures, and their 'truth'; the nature of 'truth' and the rise (and fall) of post-structuralist thought; positivism and the idea of a single answer versus a plurality of perspectives; writing and editing as collaborative practice; the role of collaboration; authorship; whether this walk is 'art' or not and whether that matters.

She questioned the latter and I say: *no, I don't think it does*. And she agrees.

Today, I walked with Gerrie van Noord. Gerrie has been sending me a song for each day, each one relating to walking in some way. She did not send me a song for today, because we sung our own. She continues to send me a 'song for the day' for the rest of my walk.





## Day 25: Loughborough to Market Harborough

45 km | 10 hour | 876 km in total | Rafee Hotel

Follow river to Barrow-on-Soar, then road to Sileby, east to East Goscote, south to Barkby Thorpe, Scraftoft, Thurnby, and Stoughton. South east to Great and Little Stretton, south to Great Glen, then south east to Kibworth Harcourt, east to East Langton, then directly south to Market Harborough.



Today my legs are aching chunks of meat, especially my right foreleg. Shin splints, apparently. Fire shoots up and down the length of my leg like targeted nettle stings: like bramble scratches underneath my skin. This morning, I halt and stop several times, having to take off my pack and dig out anti-inflammatories, or to tape-up my muscles or to stretch and stretch and stretch: anything to ease the agony! After one of these breaks, I round a corner to see an old red pick-up truck and an elderly gentleman leaning against it, peering into a field. As I pass, he looks and introduces himself: *I'm Keith*, he says, and asks if my legs are okay. (The blue, stretchy tape I used to help the ache does look odd, I admit.)

We start to speak, and we wander into the field. The conversation moves on to walking and the nature of my project and the reasons why I am doing it. *I'm an old*

*farmer; I don't know much about pilgrimage*, he says, continuing, *Besides, I'm in my 70's – I don't do much walking, either*. He seems still quite active, it's true, but explains that he had heart surgery last year, and that it was becoming more difficult because he has also recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's. I notice that he keeps his right hand in his pocket, holding it there to obscure the trembling. *It makes it difficult. My legs don't own me anymore*, he says. I ask him what he means by this and he explains that he feels his legs are now owned by someone else, someone shaky; someone who wants to walk somewhere else.

I look down at my taped and aching legs.

I walk with him, back to his truck, where a beautiful collie-dog sits in the back. She has one blue-silver eye and one dark brown. *You can pet her*, he says, *but she sometimes nips. I don't think she'll nip at you, though*. And she doesn't, just nuzzles into my palm. *She might bark when you go*, he says. I ask why she would do that. *I don't know. I guess it's just her way of saying goodbye*.

When I go to move on, Keith shakes my hand and says: *God bless you, Son*. I thank him and begin to walk away, feeling somehow more loved. I hear his truck start behind

me and as he passes me, he gives a small toot of his horn and an old hand waves from the driver's side window. The dog stands in the back of the truck, wind in her black and white fur and the sun catching her silver eye, barking and barking her goodbyes.

Elvis Costello and the Roots – *Walk Us Uptown*

## Day 26: Market Harborough to Milton Keynes

151 km | 12.5 hours | 1927 km in total | Fermynwoods Contemporary Art

A slight cheat: get dropped off at Rothwell. This is the longest day yet and you need all the help you can get. So, cut off 10 km and get to Rothwell, head south to Loddington, to Broughton, and keep going until parallel with Hannington, then south east through Sywell Wood, into Sywell, and south to Ecton. Cross the waters at Cogenhoe, into Denton, and then Horton and then through Stokepark Wood. Continue on B-roads and access roads to Castlethorpe, into Haversham and eventually into Milton Keynes, far too late.



My legs are fire. The morning is easier, but afternoon drags, especially as I get lost and have to hack my way through nettles and brambles to find the path again. My tired, almost 40 year-old body clicks and groans and creaks, and I don't remember feeling this sore, ever.

Yesterday, at the dinner Fermynwoods Contemporary Art hosted in my honour, I was given gifts all pertaining to the notion of pilgrimage, being Saint Anthony, after all. I realise now how that concept has become less and less important and the social,

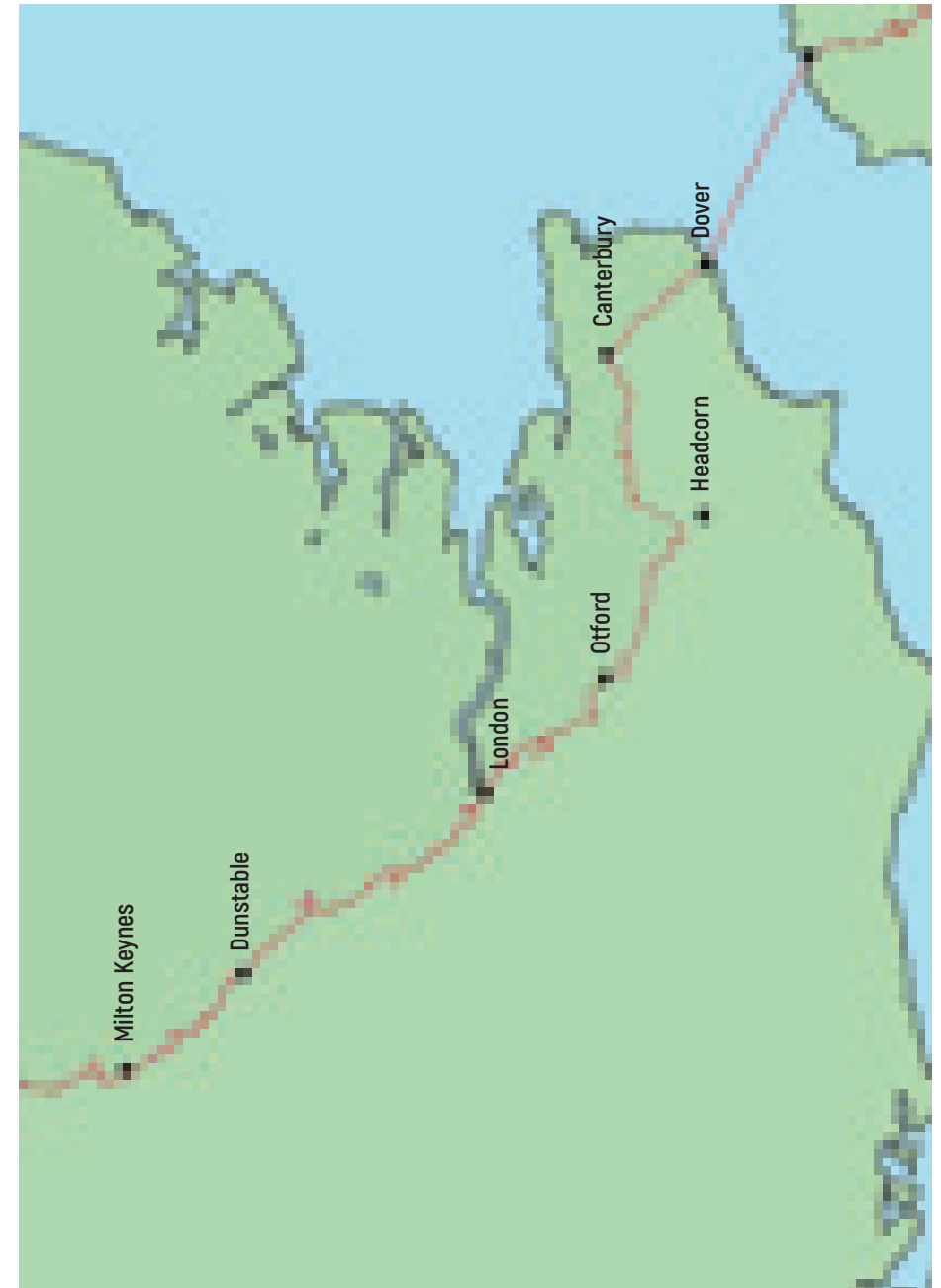
hosting and sharing exchanges have become more important. *It is solved through walking*, David Harding once said to me, and indeed, things become clearer the more I walk. I am waiting until it becomes so clear that I can begin to (productively) complicate that clarity! I am not sure I want the notions I'm grappling with to be solved. I'd rather understand what thing I am complicating. So, I walk to find out what is worth complicating.

At the end of the night, one of the artists from Fermynwoods, Sophie, drives me to the artist's residence, through locked gates and forests to the wee house, hunkered down, far into the forest.

On the drive, we speak of art and 'haptic' or 'experiential' works and then move away from art and speak of middle children and their difficulties. Being a middle child myself, I know only too well the chaos we breed! I tell her that, even today, in the struggle to walk and keep going, I was reminded of my first day, when everything was new and fresh and we all left Huntly together. There was a moment in that day when my favourite middle child (sorry, it's true: he is) ran ahead of me, ran down a furrow in a field, rushing like a river in the wrong place, in between the growing fields of green and down a track of good, fertile soil. He coursed along that track with speed and joy, all potential and promise and clumsy teenage grace. That image of that kid running ahead of me is seared into my heart and brain and I clung onto it as I step-limped my way into Milton Keynes. I tell her that this image is my personal talisman. A scallop shell for the pilgrim of an ageing also-middle-child man.

Mariachi El Bronx – *Sleep Walking*

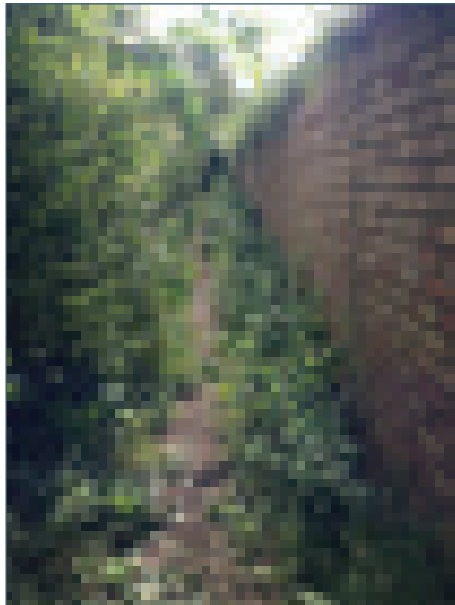
## Section 5: Milton Keynes to Dover



## Day 27: Milton Keynes to Dunstable

29 km | 6 hours | 956 km in total | Anna Berry

Through Milton Keynes, passing close to Bletchley Park, towards Little Brickhill, turn south to Great Brickhill, then veer south east to Stockgrove and Heath and Reach, Clipstone and Eggington. Just south of Stanbridge, an old railway route takes you directly into Dunstable.



Milton Keynes is a new town; a constructed community; a planned environment. The makers of such a project were certainly utopian, pulling together the druidic (the sun shines down Midsummer Avenue on mid-summers day), the pastoral (apparently, the paths the sheep used to walk were the basis for many pedestrian paths) and the academic (its construction was sociology in action) into one civil engineering dream. The planners were given *carte blanche* to make a new and futuristic city. I walk in the morning light and it does seem quite idealistic: designed rivers meander into perfectly formed lakes; wide open spaces and hedgerows separate out the cars from the living spaces; children cycle or walk to school, oblivious to the prison that is obscured metres away from their path. I actually feel it is quite sinister. There is an unreality to the town that jars with me – it is as if someone has drawn

a good and proper life down on paper and tried to make it real, without the organic fallibility of humanity.

I am not sure Milton Keynes is successful in providing what it set out to do, but it does work. I always wonder about the chaotic nature of human life, our organic complexity and our fearless illogical nature. Can humanity ever truly be planned for? Slavoj Zizek suggests that we must work towards utopia with the knowledge that it will – it must – fail, because utopias are impossible. In that sense, perhaps the only thing wrong with Milton Keynes is not that it didn't reach its utopian vision, but that it hasn't recognised that it won't. It seems overly critical of me to suggest this, but my thoughts about the city/town linger with me most of the day.

B.B. King – *Walking and Crying*



## Day 28: Dunstable to London

54 km | 13 hours | 1010 km in total | Highway Man Hotel

Dunstable to Markyate to Redbourn to St Albans on B-roads. Pavements become more common as you enter into the city. Go south through Frogmore, Radlett, and into Elstree and Borehamwood: all passable by main roads. Then go from Edgeware to Brent Cross to Hemel Hempstead, into the city and eventually Blackfriars Bridge.



As I walk towards London, I fall deeper and deeper into the urban realm. Yesterday, I noticed that, as I was moving from one small commuter hamlet to the next, the only wildness was the paths through constructed woodland. All this urbanity now shocks my system, which has been so used to the quiet of the green and the company of sheep and the feel of long tall grass on my hands as I pass. Where, now, are the curious cows? Or the buzzards and their sharp eyes? They have been replaced by drivers who look at me with shock and suspicion: who is that dirty man? Why is he carrying a big stick? I must look like a vagabond.

I meet a dear, dear friend, Alice, in Elstree and we walk for hours and hours in the hot, hot heat: the city radiating its tarmac scent. I find it surreal to be walking next to a friend, as if we are walking through the park together, on the way to the pub or something. As if the past month has not happened. I begin to have that strange feeling of disconnection between myself and the rest of the world, because I am unable to share my recent experiences. I am unable to share with Alice what, exactly, it has been like to be so lonely, so tired, and so sore. I am unable even to share a similar experience, as so few people have done similar things to this mad walk. Culture, it

has been said, is the shared experiences of a group of people. I feel I have become a culture of my own, and I have nothing with which to translate my world to the world I walk through. Alice understands this and she takes photographs for me that act as a way to tell the story. She walks quietly and makes me laugh and doesn't pressure me to do anything, but continue.

Led Zeppelin – *Ramble On*

## Day 29: London to Otford

35 km | 7.5 hours | 1045 km in total | Krystyna Ivell

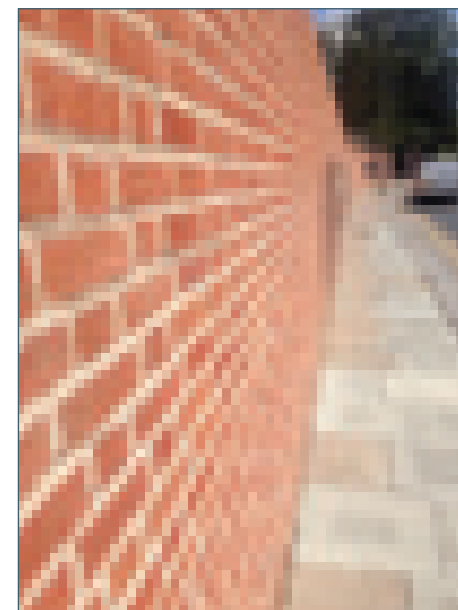
Using the roads and pavements of the London metropolis, head towards Horn Park, then south east into Chislehurst and into Orpington. Cross over M25 and into Otford.

Krystyna, a beautiful, regal Polish lady, is a friend of my husband's and offered to put me up in her paradise in London. I leave her house and head towards my starting point today (Blackfriars Bridge). I wait at the Fenchurch Street Underground station as six full and over-stuffed trains stop. More people are sardined into the carriage and then shuttle into the gaping maw of the city. With The Backpack, The Stick and my general bulky stuff, I have to wait over thirty minutes before I can wheedle myself into the crowd, cram myself into the hoard of commuters and hold my breath.

After two days off in London, The Leg is feeling tender and still a bit swollen, but is coping. I spend the vast majority of the day trying to escape the city. I had not realised how rural I have been over the past month, and it's not until London's dirty streets appear under my boots and its rough air leaves me with black snot, that I fully begin to appreciate what a beast it is and how I desperately want to get back to the trees and fields.

So, I spend six hours today slowly extricating myself from London, untangling its roads with my boots, using a highlighter pen on my map to follow all the twists and turns of the city's beast-like being to trace a way out, like Ariadne's string in the Minotaur's maze.

As the concrete begins morphing into grass and the lampposts start becoming trees, I realise that, while I have been in the city, I have not been stung by a nettle for two days. I laugh at the thought, and look down in time to catch a stray nettle leaf nip The Leg with its itchy scratch. As the day wears on and I begin walking on muddy



paths, getting stung by more nettles and scratched by more brambles, I begin missing the concrete more and more. By the time I reach my day's destination, I have walked through an entire field of scratchy thistle, through boggy scratchy fields that contain surly animals, rough wheat seeds getting stuck in my socks. Paradise is always somewhere else, I suppose.

Ewan Maccoll – *The Moving On Song*

### Day 30: Otford to Headcorn

41 km | 8.5 hours | 1086 km in total | Fiona MacDonald

East to Kemsing, then directly south to Noah's Ark, then zig-zag down to Plaxtol. Follow Carpenter's Lane to Hadlow, then east to Hale Street, Yalding, Hunton. Take path between Linton and Chainhurst south east until Farthing Green, then go a bit further to Headcorn.

Fiona, an artist and keen forager, hosts me in her garden with homemade elderflower cordial. When I leave in the morning, the walk pulls me southward and ten minutes after setting-off, a man walking his dog looks at my backpack and says: *You're brave if you think you're going to Calais. Migrants!*

In the initial planning of the project, there was a discussion about migration and how this was tied directly to walking, because it seems that, contemporaneously, only illegal immigrants walk. Everyone else can take trains and cars, but walking long distances is suspect. We wanted to complicate this notion. Soon after I started, however, the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe exploded and the media reportage of it



undoubtedly led to the comments from the Man Walking His Dog (as well as others, like the Lady in Macclesfield). The comments make me uncomfortable, as I never know if I should point out the lack of compassion and racist undertones. But I am also uncomfortable, as it feels as if I am expected to have a deeper insight or opinion about this political issue, because I am also walking.

As I've mentioned before, I'm a white, privileged male with the choice and luxury to undertake the project and the ability to freely move between borders. I also have a home to return to when this project is over. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to claim any insight or political narrative about the refugee crisis or use the walk as a way to highlight the plight of refugees.

However, that does not stop me from disagreeing with people like the Man Walking His Dog and his comments, which I did. The artist Emma Smith once suggested that social practice artworks are inherently about confronting difference, and perhaps this is why this walk, any long-distance walk, is important, because I am continually re-located to areas and places and sites of community who have alternative viewpoints to my own. The Man Walking His Dog thinking that I am brave to go into Calais because of its 'migrant issue' definitely holds a different political vision to myself. While I do not change his mind in our five-minute exchange, we do have a moment to examine our differences, which would not have occurred without the walk. This is what interests me about the walk. Rather than the act of walking itself, or even the rights of movement, or any of the other ideas of pilgrimage. It is simply that in moving places, I am continually confronted by difference, and in that confrontation, I examine my own way of being in the world, and hope I do something the same to the people I encounter.

The Cinematic Orchestra – *And Relax*

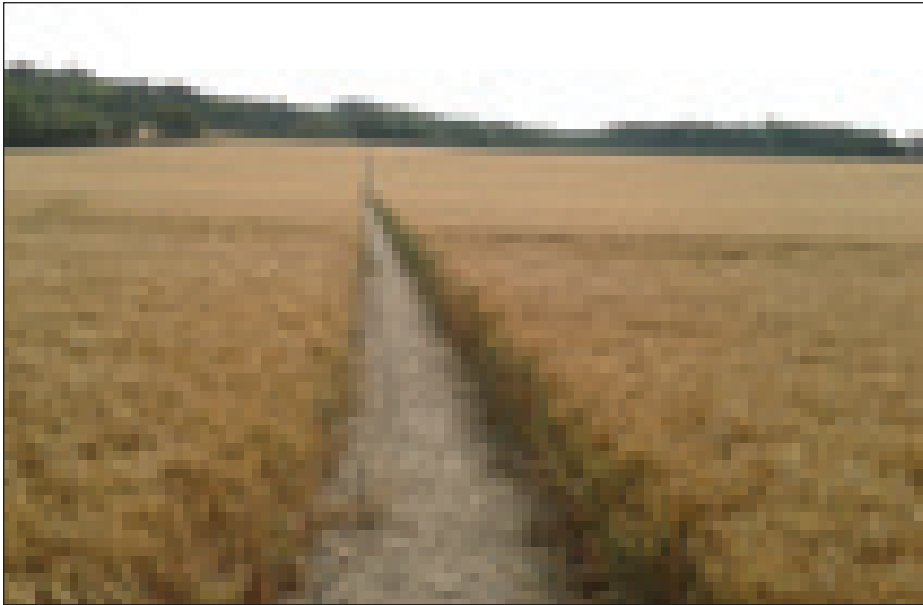
### Day 31: Headcorn to Canterbury

41 km | 8.5 hours | 1127 km in total | Sophie and Ali Douglas

Take Lenham Road towards Grafty Green, through Platt's Heath, Sandway and Lenham then, one of the strange times you head north west, towards Otterden Place, wiggling west to Throwley Forstal and Shottenden. From Chilham, meet the river and follow east into Canterbury.

Today, I meet my host, Matthew, at 2pm. We drift through the hazy, heat of wheat-fields towards Canterbury, discussing local history, pre-history, mathematics, religion, science, art and the concept of a walking artist. The insects buzz in the fields and go quiet as we pass. The wheat is turning gold. We talk easily and suddenly we are in a picturesque town with punts along the river, the water runs clear enough to see the emerald green weeds flow and sway like Ophelia's hair. The Cathedral reaches up like some ancient rocket-ship that might have landed on Earth in the middle-ages. I find it hard to think of this as an important site to me, because I have no religious or conceptual link to the place. It is, however, where I join up with the Via Francigena, the path I will follow towards the rest of my European route. I try not to be daunted by that impending reality.

The night prior to this, Sophie and Ali put me up in a modernised, beautiful converted old bakery. They had a bath drawn for me on arrival, with water that



flowed from beautifully designed taps; the carpets were soft and TV hummed in the background. Their dogs excitedly wanted to know who I was, licked my feet, curious and excited. Sophie offered to do my laundry and cooked me a lasagne. The bed was soft and I slept well and I signed their guest book as I left.

Here, at Matthew's, the one-room chalet has no running water, but the meal we share with his neighbours is calm. Chickens scratch the dirt around us and Albion the Goose wanders around the table, occasionally stealing a fallen morsel of food. Earlier, the broom seeds were popping in the heat of the afternoon sun and everything else was quiet in the woods. The toilet involves shredded tree bark. There is no electricity and only the glow of candlelight lights my thoughts.

This is the experience of The Walk – I am shuttled and shunted through the various different lenses of life. I think of the Bedouin or the Gypsy or other nomads who move from place to place, their heads under different trees every night, and I realise that at least they have their tents, a travelling home. Something that is always constant. I will pull my blue scarf around my shoulders as I tuck myself into bed tonight, let the quiet of the stunningly beautiful woods fill the room, and blow out the candle-light to let the darkness echo into the room like a dream.

*Motorhead – Walk a Crooked Mile*

## Day 32: Canterbury to Dover

29 km | 7 hours | 1156 km in total | Matthew Watkins

Follow Pilgrim's Way, intercepting with the Via Francigena route for the first time, out of Canterbury. It leads through Patricbourne, veers south of Aylesham, through Womenswold, Woolage Green, Shepherdswell, Coldred and into Whitfield, and finally into Dover.

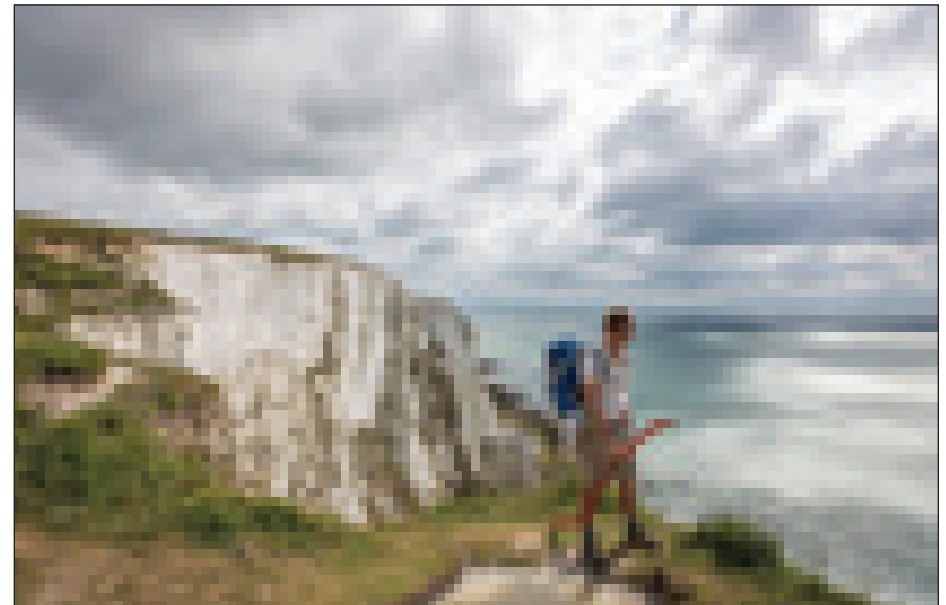
As I leave Matthew's beautiful home, I realise that it has taken just over a month of walking to make it here, (almost) the entire length of the UK.

In Canterbury town, artist Emma Smith joins me for the whole day and we decide to walk until we reach the ocean. We attach ourselves to each other with audio-recording equipment, and we comfortably fall into step, linked by wires and cables. It is only at the end of the day that I realise we have spent five and half hours utterly connected, never less than three feet from each other. We have discussed – amongst other things – the physicality of walking and whether that affects the conceptual concepts that emerge: for example, if speed, destination, gait and endpoints of walking might be curated, affected, influenced and, in that process, become adjustable or changeable.

I stumble onto the beach in Dover, the giant port like a fortress of concrete, and the blue grey of the Channel is a thin stretch between me and an entire continent to cross. I feel a palpable sense of nervousness. The end of this small island and the beginning of something bigger. I have a day off tomorrow to get the ferry and to prepare myself for leaving the safety of this culture, to merge into something else.

I wonder if this will be the making of the project. When the safety of things I already know disappears, clinging on to the White Cliffs of Dover. I will need to edge, eke and forge my way over to the continent, for a fresh new beginning, a new path to walk. The wind picks up and Emma departs. Suddenly there are only waves.

*The Chemical Brothers – The Golden Path*



## Section 6: Calais to Laon



### Day 33: Calais to Licques

23 km | 6 hours | 1179 km in total | Hotel Europa

Follow the canal south out of Calais, crossing under A14 highway. Leave the canal at Planche Tournoire, following south towards Guines, walking parallel to D127 motorway. At Guines, turn south east to Campagne-lès-Guines, south to Ecottes, and through the woods to Licques.

France is wet. Or at least it is today. Very wet.

It is also very lonely. In the morning, I find myself avoiding conversation because my French is as rough as a three-day hangover. And so, I slink across the edge of the continent, trying to remember the language, forcing my tongue to change shape. Words on signs become an opportunity to practice and I find that as I see the word and speak it out, phonetically – like a child learning to read – the meaning slowly comes back to me: ‘usine’ means ‘factory’; ‘église’ is a church. I remember the words for ‘shop,’ ‘sale,’ and ‘for rent.’ (I have, it seems, a predominately commercial grasp of the language. What does this say about how we educate children in other languages!?)

Later in the day, I feel confident enough to order tea in a café, and the exchange goes so well, that I challenge myself to speak to a stranger. As I walk through a small village, the opportunity presents itself to me, as an older man standing by the path laughs, nods to my pack and the rain, and says something to me. I stumble. I freeze. I apologise (in French) and then say something about *faire une marche*, and forget the word for Great Britain and the word for Venice. He looks at me as I mumble, stumble and pause, apologise and try again. His smile fades and he nods, says *oui*, turns and walks into his house.

I walk on, angry at myself, feeling slightly more isolated.

Luckily, the rain comes heavier and there is no-one about for the rest of the day, everyone else is sheltered indoors. I stay in the wet, so I don’t have to speak to anyone.

Tinariwen – *Amassakoul ‘N’ Tenere*





## Day 34: Licques to La Ferme des Templiers de Fléchinelle

44 km | 9 hours | 1223 km in total | Donald and Joanneke Boyd-Kruijssen

South east towards La Quingioie, wiggling around small villages until Alquines. East passing through Le Buisson, l'As de Licques, Westbécourt, Acquin, Quelmes, Leulinghem, Wisques, and Wizernes. Then turn south to Inghem, and into Therouanne, Enguinegatte, then Equine-les-Mines and finally east into La Ferme des Templiers de Fléchinelle.



Donald fae Huntly hosted me last night. He happened to be in the area on his holiday, and offered to put me up. I am swaddled in his family's warmth, and we watch the Tour de France while having a beer. After the wetness, it is heaven to be warm.

In the morning, as I set out, storms build. Last night's rain, briefly paused, comes back with intermittent wrath. I have my waterproofs on, and it's warm, so it isn't too horrific, but in the late-morning, the wind picks up fierce, and I am buffeted on all sides. My waterproofs act like sails. If it had been coming from behind me, I could have leapt in the air and travelled by wind power alone, but the wind cannot decide which way to go, and it pushes and pulls. I wobble along like a balloon. I fight it for most of the day.

In the haze of the rain and wind there are (seemingly) hundreds of shrines and crucifixes. I pass at least twenty churches and I meet a man in a black cloak: a monk, Brother John, from a local abbey. He asks me if I am taking a pilgrimage (in French) and in my broken language and his flawless English, we speak about the project. It is, I suggest, a secular pilgrimage, and he nods and smiles and asks questions. On parting, he asks me to keep searching for God. I tell him that I will and I am looking

in my head and heart. It's not a lie, but nor is it an admission that I have a festering religiosity, brought on by all this talk of pilgrimages, God and sacred places. Gladly, my existentialism is still firmly tattooed onto my skin like every wayward freckle. I have been reflecting on notions of belief, and as I do, I become more confident in the necessity of a plurality of such systems: that many approaches can exist together without an ontological crisis. I am not looking for Brother John's God in my head and heart, but the process of self-examination allows a parallel inquiry, metaphorically identical but semantically couched in 'art', rather than 'God'.

Tonight, I stay in a converted Knights Templar farm. I imagine them, those knights, wandering back from Jerusalem: the blood of The Crusades on their swords, walking the length of a continent for their church, their roving like the wind from this morning, meandering, forceful, directionless. Such thoughts of religion never did anyone any good. They may have built some nice castles, but I am not sure it allowed us our separate approaches to life. Perhaps this old approach to God is finally over, and we can use its carcass for more interesting and comfortable things.

Black M – *Sur Ma Route*

## Day 35: La Ferme des Templiers de Fléchinelle to Bruay-la-Buissière

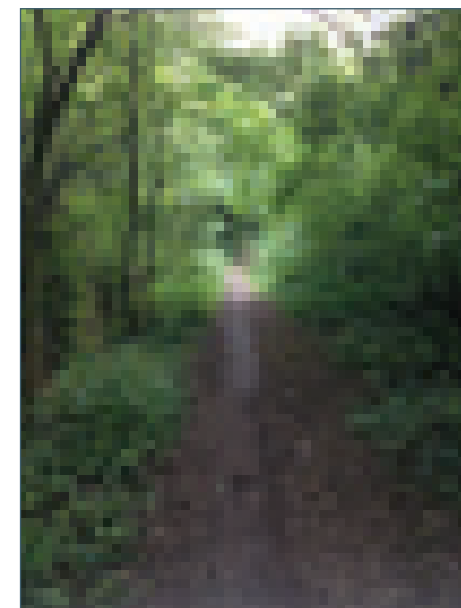
26 km | 5.5 hours | 1249 km in total | Hotel la Ferme des Templiers de Fléchinelle

South east over the hill towards la Tirmande, Ligny-les-Aire, continuing through until Amettes. Follow the farming paths between Bailleul-lès-Pernes and Ferfay into Floringhem. South east into Camblain-Châtelain, and direct east until Bruay-en-Artois.

I get lost in a small village today. I can't match the curving old streets with the lines on the map. Everything feeds into one, and no matter where I set out from, I keep returning to the same place, stepping, slightly confused, into the same picturesque square. After the third time, I stop and sit on the side of a fountain to look at the map better. Sitting in the middle of the early morning sunny square, I imagine seeing another version of myself popping out of another side street, confused to arrive in the same place, again. I watch him turn down another street just in time to see a third version of myself appear from another alleyway.

How many of 'me' are currently lost? I become slightly panicked thinking about that.

Then, a text arrives from Rachael, ensuring I am okay, and it reminds me that I am not doing this project alone. Far from



it. It's very important to me to celebrate and scream the praises of everyone involved – Claudia, Rachael, Joss, Juliette, Cat, Camilla, Elisabetta and the rest of the Deveron Arts team. They are my anchors to the world. I feel like every day they carefully feed out a bit more thread, unravel a bit more string, that shows me my way back if I need, gently guiding me forward.

I am not lost because there are map-readers hovering behind me; I am not lost because there are hosts who have looked after me; I am not lost because someone's checking in on me, thirty-five days walking distance from here. And although that seems so far away, I feel stronger knowing that I am not lost.

I get up and leave the fountain and manage to find my way out of the small town into the wide open air of France's countryside.

Air – *Univers*al Traveller

### Day 36: Bruay-la-Buissière to Acq

21 km | 5 hours | 1270 km in total | Le Cottage Hotel

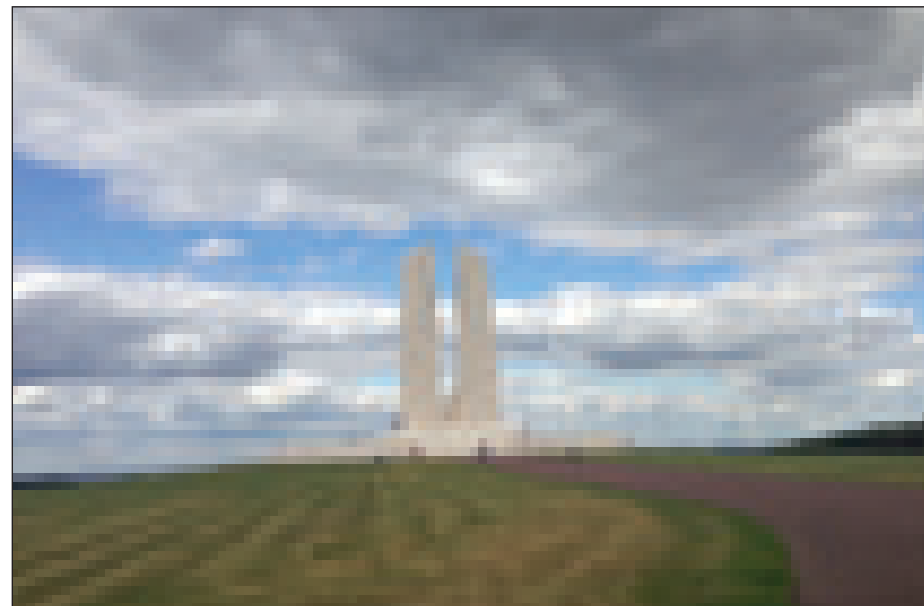
South until you enter Houdain and meet up with the ancient pilgrimage path, *Chaussée Brunehaut*. South east on this as long as possible, veering off to Hermin to avoid motorways. Continue south east to Cambligneul, and Camblain-l'Abbé, then turn directly south to Frévin-Capelle, and then east into Acq.

To me, Europe will always sound like bird-song in a quiet village. And it will always smell of fresh manure. Today validates those sentiments, several times over. I feel like I am repeating the same walk that I have been doing since I arrived: past endless rows of wheat, past some turnip fields and the occasional splash of green, green corn. I seem to have been doing this, forever.

France is, apparently, on holiday. And will be for the next three weeks. This explains why I see no-one and experience nothing but empty village after empty village. The most movement I see are cars on distant highways and the quiet thrumming of a tractor, three fields away.

Still, it gives me time for quiet reflection. In this area of Northern France, there are hundreds of signs for various military monuments, memorials and commemorations. Not far from here there is the Canadian memorial at Vimy. I walk through a village with a military museum and several Commonwealth War Graves. When I arrive into Acq, my host shows me the mortar shell he found and explains (I think – I am still grasping at the language) that children and farmers are, to this day, stumbling on unexploded bombs because this area was so riddled with war.

I have few overt connections to the history of the World Wars, though, my mother once told me that my great grandfather survived The Somme, apparently, only because he was tall. He had said to her when she was young that compatriots of his had jumped out of the boats with their heavy packs and weapons and simply sunk into the water, unable to gasp for air. His six-foot frame kept his head above water, barely, as he struggled to breath, struggled to land on soft, uneven sand and walk forwards. Before now, I had no use for this knowledge, apart from it being an interesting family story. As I stand at the edge of the field with my host, and he points out the bumps



in the landscape that are the holes of war, where there are still bodies buried, it has more and more resonance.

It becomes another thing that I was not aware of until my feet sketched this part of the earth. This is what walking does. Our feet translate the intangible, cultural heritage into lived experience. So far, I've walked through land-use, religion, politics and now war. What does the rest of the path hold?

Françoise Hardy et Jacques Dutronc – *Puisque Vous Partez en Voyage*

### Day 37: Acq to Arras

15 km | 3 hours | 1285 in total | Hotel Le Domaine des Pierres

South to Ecoivres, and then through the small woods south to Maroeuil, and then into Anzin-Saint-Aubin and Arras.

After today, I will have a pause: I will not be staying in Arras but, going to visit family and sleeping in a familiar bed. In order not to break the continuity of The Walk, I leave The Damned Stick and The Oak, hidden and safe, in a secret location. When I return from the break in three days' time, I shall pick them up and carry on from that point. Leaving them is traumatic. I feel like I am leaving my children in the middle of the woods, undefended, unprotected. I get nervous thinking about it.

Considering this short, impending break, I begin reflecting on what's happened up to now. My thoughts are jumbled, but I feel sure that I have jettisoned the 'pilgrimage' concept: The Venice Biennale is not a 'sacred place' to me. Instead, I have been focusing on the social aspect, such as the hosts, the different people I have met and the changing culture. Now, to have an art festival endpoint seems rather intangible and unreal to me. When I walk, I don't really think about the destination anymore, but

rather the daily mechanics, the practicalities and the process of the walk. I think this is the natural process of making art – to focus on its becoming – and I think to spend too much energy on what it will be at the end would be instrumentalising the work. This would be disingenuous to its forming, forcing it into a shape that it might not be.

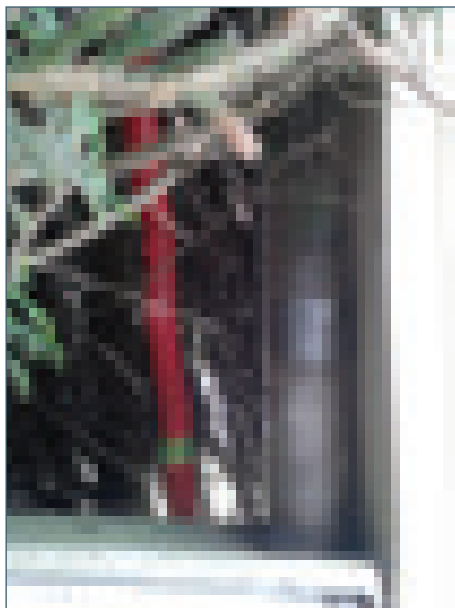
As such, I can't imagine how this work might ever exist in an art festival like the Venice Biennale, simply because it is still forming. Also, because the work exists in the process, in the exchanges, in the changing landscape, in the conversations, in the thoughts and in the steps. I am not, as I have explained tirelessly, taking photographs

or painting as I walk. The whole thing *is* the art: not the actual plodding or the steps taken, but the entirety of the thing: the people I meet, those I talk to, the mapping, the hosting, all of it!

And how can one present such an entirety, in such a self-contained manner that is demanded of places like art galleries and festivals? I'm not sure one can. That is the mismatch between art as 'process', and art as 'object'. I must continue making the work: continue walking.

I guess it's a bit like The Oak and The Damned Stick in their hiding place over these next four days. They exist, they have a history and a purpose: they still have a presence. Even though they're no longer in my hand or swaddled to my backpack, they still have meaning.

James – *Walk Like You*



### Day 38: Arras to Bapaume

25 km | 5.5 hours | 1310 km in total | Hotel Balladins

Heading south east out of the city, aim towards Neuville-Vitasse, from there, take farm roads to Boiry-Becquerelle, Saint-Léger, Mory and Favreuil, entering Bapaume from the north.

My feet are not ready this morning. They stumble over themselves, heavy again in these boots, tripping and unsettled on French paths. My hands, too, don't know where to go. They have forgotten the comfortable way they hang and swing off my arms as I march. Instead, they fidget, adjust my bag, hold The Stick, fiddle with my shirt, my shorts, tug at socks, and grasp at slowly growing hair.

It is amazing how quickly one forgets. Or, how quickly things change: I think this walk has become a different beast than we had originally planned. Or, at least, entered

a new and different context. Something more insular and reflective.

I have often found that my projects become different about halfway through, and, indeed, I am almost at the midpoint of this project. It is as if, when I work, the first half is about understanding the processes, learning the vocabulary, reading the manuals. The second half is the unravelling of that into something that makes cohesive sense. I feel the process of unravelling begin as I start up today: my body knows something has changed and is seeking a new rhythm. I'm unsure whether I find it, everything feels as if it's in bits and pieces.

This feeling almost becomes literal when, as I walk on a dusty farming road near Bapaume, I nearly stand on an unexploded hand-grenade.

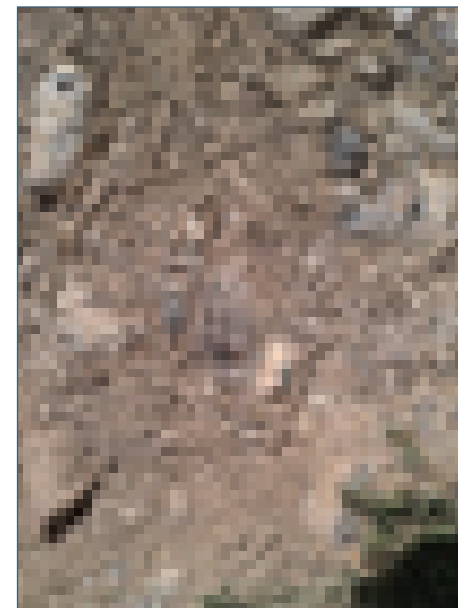
I stop. I look down at it carefully. It is buried in the caked mud and rocks of decades. A lingering (and most probably harmless) souvenir of another time and another war. I consider digging it out as a memento, but then think better of it. Just in case.

I look up from the dusty road, shading my eyes from the sun: I wonder if I should tell someone. There is, however, no one to tell. The closest village is 6 km away and only the distant rush of cars on the motorway on the horizon gives any hint that this place is populated at all. I look down again, wondering if this ancient weapon is just a hollow shell, or if it is still potent, still has the possibility of exploding into brilliant light and noise.

I suppose that is what I feel about this project: Is it a hollow thing that only resembles an art project, or does it have a kick inside, an explosive birth of interesting ideas and concepts?

The only way to discover that would be to walk over it. So, I put my foot on the ground, and walk on.

Depeche Mode – *Walking In My Shoes*



### Day 39: Bapaume to Estrées-Mons

30 km | 8 hours | 1340 km in total | Hotel de la Paix

Sticking to farming roads, head south to Lesboeufs and Morval, turning due east to Sailly-Saillisel joining a long, straight motorway to Peronne. This will take several hours: be careful. Go through Peronne heading south until Mesnil-Bruntel, turning south east to Estrées-Mons.

Today is hot. Too hot for my freckled skin. You'd think a man like me, raised in the heat

of Africa and under Middle-Eastern suns, would be happy to be in such sunshine, but it just wears me thin. The day is hard-going: a slog and a plodding, thumping walk on dry, hard earth. The soles of my feet are bruised. To be clear, however: I'm not complaining about the heat. I'd rather heat than cold. At least I know what to do with heat. One just lets it pass through you, allowing the stillness and the waves of hotness like one would allow the wind. One doesn't fight heat. The cold, on the other hand: one can do nothing about.

The cold takes residence in your bones like a steel raccoon: all sharpness and invading. The heat is a kinder visitor, albeit, sometimes exhausting.

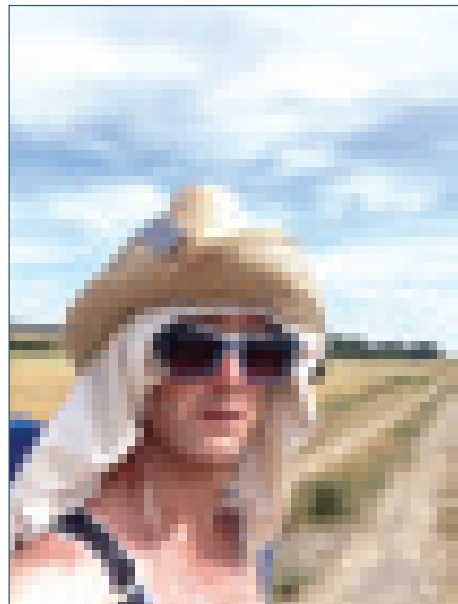
And, exhausting it is, today. The fields seem to stretch and the roads and paths seem to drag. I force myself to drink water, and wear my scratchy hat, even though I prefer it off and feeling the cool of my evaporating sweat.

I think about how pilgrims would often take up their path because it would offer them a different experience than their daily lives. Gone would be the drudgery of farm-work, or the indenture to land and agriculture. Gone would be the hard life of medieval villages, in its place, a new thing would take shape: the life of a wanderer, albeit a wanderer with a destination. Often, going on a pilgrimage would mean that the walker might never return to his/her village and his/her life, either because they might die (the road was, and is, a dangerous place) or because they would walk into a different life.

I am sure to return to my life. My ache for the comforts of my Love and the softness of his hair and the colours of my life are embedded into me and I know, in fifty+ days, I will be again slotted into where I belong. But this time offers something different and in such a difference it gives perspective. It casts new light.

I am not sure what that perspective will mean yet – a new take or understanding on 'art'? A better grasp of my own needs and wants in the world? A desire to not travel so much? I don't know. But when the sun beats down and the dry earth stares up, one is confronted with a different life, a different way of being, and it's exhausting to face it every plodding day.

Brambles – *Arête*



## Day 40: Estrées-Mons to Tergnier

39 km | 9 hours | 1379 km in total | Le Clos des Sablons

Follow east to Chaussée Brunehaut to roundabout, then south east to Tertry and Vaux-en-Vermandois. Then south to Fluqueieres and Tugny-et-Pont, crossing the river. At Saint Simon, just south of that crossing, join the canal and follow it for most of the day: it leads you directly into Tergnier.

A man asks me if I need water today. I have just filled my bottle, so decline, and carry on, keeping my head down so the shade of my hat covers my face.

Today takes doubly long again. I am shattered by the heat, but I wrote of that yesterday, and you don't need to know more than that. I am cultivating some amazing tan-lines. I shall be striped where my backpack rests, and there is a line around my ankles where my socks end that seems to split me into two ethnicities. In these lines, I become marked, like some strange, foreign animal. And this is what I feel like: of the quiet villagers, those who look up, stare open mouthed. Those that pass in cars, turn their heads as if they have spotted a rare creature in the undergrowth, some interesting thing that hasn't been seen around in years. In one sense, I am: walkers, pilgrims, those who do not travel by motorised transport (in such a blatant manner) are indeed rare things. I have yet to meet another one. This is, perhaps, because it is not the best weather to be out walking – the phrase *only mad dogs and Englishmen* springs to mind. Perhaps all the people in the cars, and those resting in shady shade, are not gawping at my walkingness, but rather at the madness of someone walking in such heat.

Early in the day, before the heat strikes, I look up at the sky and see hundreds of cloud traces left by airplanes: the water vapour trails slowly dissipating and criss-crossing. It strikes me that these were the documents of a journey, the visible clues to travel. What, I wondered would be the trace of this journey? The Damned Stick? If I plant The Oak, will it be the remainder? Or my dirty single shirt, no longer white, or even the same shape as how it started. Or could my tan-lines, even though they will fade, somehow be a sufficient marker?

I look down at the road I am walking on and wonder if the road itself could be a document. Could I claim them as my own, all these paths? They might not belong to me, but the single path that I make by joining them up to get me from Huntly to Venice will be mine. And not just mine, but all the people who are involved in the project: Karen



and Amy and Ruth, and Claudia and Rachael and Matthew and Emma and Donald and everyone else who has become part of the walk – it could be their path too.

I like the idea of claiming a road as part of one's own artwork, and so I declare it out loud to the hot sunshine, but nothing responds.

Annie Lennox – *Walking On Broken Glass*

## Day 41: Tergnier to Laon

47 km | 8.5 hours | 1426 km in total | Hotel Le Paon

East towards La Fère, and then south through Charmes and onwards to Bertaucourt-Epourdon, and then through the woods to Saint-Nicolas-Aux-Bois, and onwards to Cessieres, east to Molinchart, zig-zagging towards Clacy-et-Thierret. Get lost trying to take a short cut between there and Laon, eventually finding the N2 highway. Cross this, finding Rue d'Ardon, and then up into Laon.

Today marks the halfway point. Not in distance, or walking days: they fall under a different measuring scale. Today is the midway of days. Since leaving, I am 3 kg lighter, with scratches and scrapes, with bruises and bumps. But still going. And I look different, feel different, and think differently about the project. It's less about the Venice Biennale and more about something else. I have learned to walk 40 km a day, and learned to know the call of a forming blister. I have learned and grown new muscles and lost others.

In the sunshine of the afternoon, I stumble along a route that was not on the map as the path disappears. Nettles grow thicker, and jagged burrs push tighter into me.



Bushes kneel closer to my shoulders. Eventually, the brambles start creeping over. The path most certainly used to be a path, the trees had been cut away on either side, but it is also definitely a path less travelled.

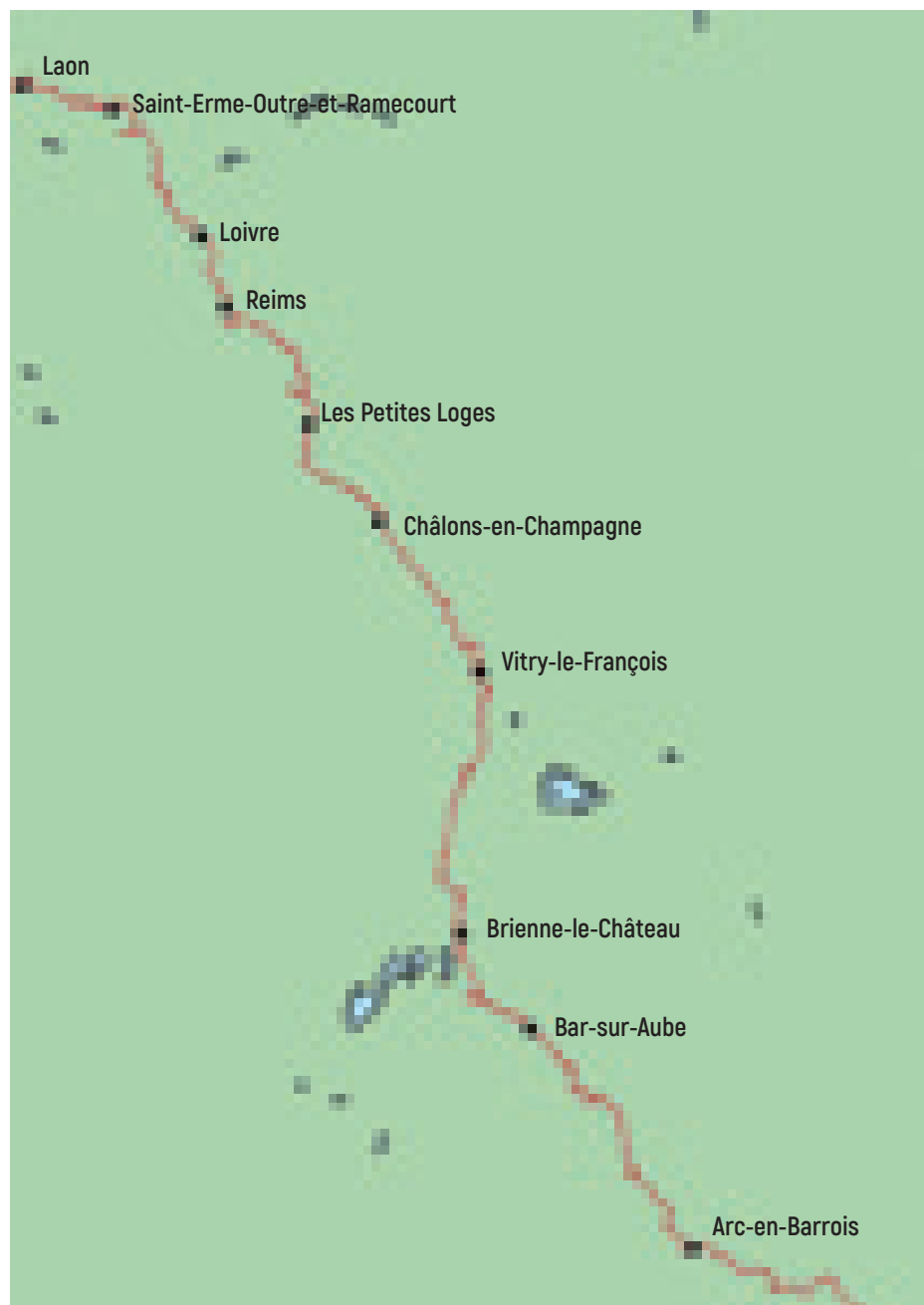
I think: *I could turn around. I should turn around.* But I know I am a foolhardy boy and so I carry on. The thorns rip at my leg flesh, my arms, my ears. My thighs have wee scratches and small lines of blood. I begin to use The Stick to help hack away at some of the brambles, and as I am hacking away, a part of The Stick hits a particularly sturdy bit of woodland and a large part of it breaks off.

It seems somewhat fitting that it should go through some sort of transformation on this particular day: the halfway point. Looking down at its broken tip, I am saddened, yes, but I'm not distraught. It makes The Stick into something different. And new things can only occur when old things change. When I started this walk, fifty-five days ago, I noticed so much death: fauns and deer by the roadside, endless birds squashed on the highways, crushed hedgehogs on the paths. Once, I saw a jet-black mole, clean as spring water, placed on a high fence post. It can't have long died, his all-too-human fingers were still pink and fresh. He looked like an old man who had just closed his eyes for a minute. Far from reading these deaths as auguries of foreboding, I read them as symbols of rebirth: that old things were closing, and new things were beginning. Now, I choose to read the same truth about The Stick's shortening. Now, in its shortened form, it no longer has the air of authority. Instead of reaching my shoulder, it stands just less than height of my heart. Still tall, but less gallus. It seems more introspective, more gentle somehow. I think I like it a better this way.

Katy Perry – *Walk On Air*



## Section 7: Laon to Arc-en-Barrois



### Day 42: Laon to Saint-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt

20 km | 4 hours | 1446 km in total | Ibis Hotel – Laon

South east out of the town of Laon, skirting above Bruyères-et-Montbérault, in to Parfondru, then wiggling towards Festieux. After this, follow logging roads through Courtrizy-et-Fussigny and directly into Bibrax, into Outre.

I notice in myself a need to prove that I am actually working hard, and not having too nice of a time on *my wee walk*. This gets me thinking about the notion of difficulty and struggle and where that fits into art. Recently, I heard about a man that walked the length of the Nile, and I thought about my project in relation to his. He may have walked four times longer, but he also had a team of camels or cars or trucks following him throughout the journey. Whereas, I am carrying everything on my back. He skipped out 450 miles to avoid a war, but I have (almost) walked every step.

The desire to compare and contrast is natural: it's how we make sense of things. We hold things up against each other and see how they fit, how they're different, how they're the same. The issue is what criteria are being compared and contrasted. The Nile Walk project was not art (and, to be fair, I think I'm still struggling about that



notion in regards to my project, too!), so, in some way, it's looking at two different, only vaguely similar experiences. Comparing them is unproductive. There lingers a question of value: if he struggles more, is it a better project? If I get more blisters than him, would I then be better? If someone drives to the Venice Biennale from Huntly, would my project have more value, because I struggled? From where does



this equation that ‘struggle = better’ emerge? And why does it still linger? In so many ways, the cliché of the suffering artist in his cold garret is a modernist idea: something out-of-touch and out-of-date with both society and making art today. We are no longer Van Gogh and his tortured life, and I would argue that one can still make brilliant art without falling into the cliché of suffering.

Which is not to say this project is not difficult. It is. Very difficult. But I would hesitate to suggest that just because it is difficult, ergo it is ‘good’ art.

Pink Floyd – *Take Up Thy Stethoscope and Walk*

### Day 43: Saint-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt to Loivre

26 km | 5 hours | 1472 km in total | Performing Arts Forum

South to Berrieux, turning off towards Juvincourt-et-Damary, using farming paths to take you into Berry-au-Bac, and crossing the River Aisne there. Join the canal once on the south side of the river and follow directly into Loivre.

This morning, I wake up in a converted nunnery. It is now filled with artists and musicians, whom I spent the evening socialising and relaxing with. As I stir and open my eyes, I have the briefest glimmer of a thought: *What if I just stayed here? What if I don't go anywhere and just stay in this converted convent, this mad-house for artists, enjoying the communal dinners and eating pears from the orchard, and never walking again?* It is a fleeting thought that gets lost between the crumple of bed sheets and my feet touching the ground. I am eager to get moving, because... because...because, I guess I want to complete this thing. It is only once I complete it that I will know what it is! So, I



set off early, letting the morning sun stretch my shadow long over the wheat-fields.

The next seven days will be relatively short. Looking at my route, I want to push forward, push onwards, skip a day, but arrangements have already been made, hosts already organised, events and meeting points already scheduled. To go faster would mess up all that careful planning. So, I try to learn patience, and after an easy five hours today, I find shade and set my sweaty shoes and socks drying in the midday heat. In that resting heat – the quiet of the afternoon, when even crickets are still – I think about how there is fundamentally no way to translate the heavy feeling in my legs or the special sort of ache of my feet touching the floor for the first time in the morning. Nor the repetitive nature of the day's special routines, the cycles of the footsteps, the cycles of the map-reading, the cycles of beaks and pauses, the cycles in my thought patterns.

To write all that down in any meaningful way would, I think, come across as slightly bonkers. It would be like the cartographers who wished to make the most exact map in the world, and in order to do so, they would have to make their map the same size as the world: so big and exact that it is useless. The moral of that story being that exactitude does not work in matters of translation; to speak of one thing in the language of another will only fail. Poetic gestures are the only things to travel between different states.

So the poetic gesture – the disruptive imagination – of the walk is perhaps the only thing to translate: it comes in the madness of joining one place (Huntly) to another (the Venice Biennale) by the feet of an artist; by walking a pilgrimage to a site that is no longer holy; by getting up every day and continuing on.

Mogwai – *Travel is Dangerous*

### Day 44: Loivre to Reims

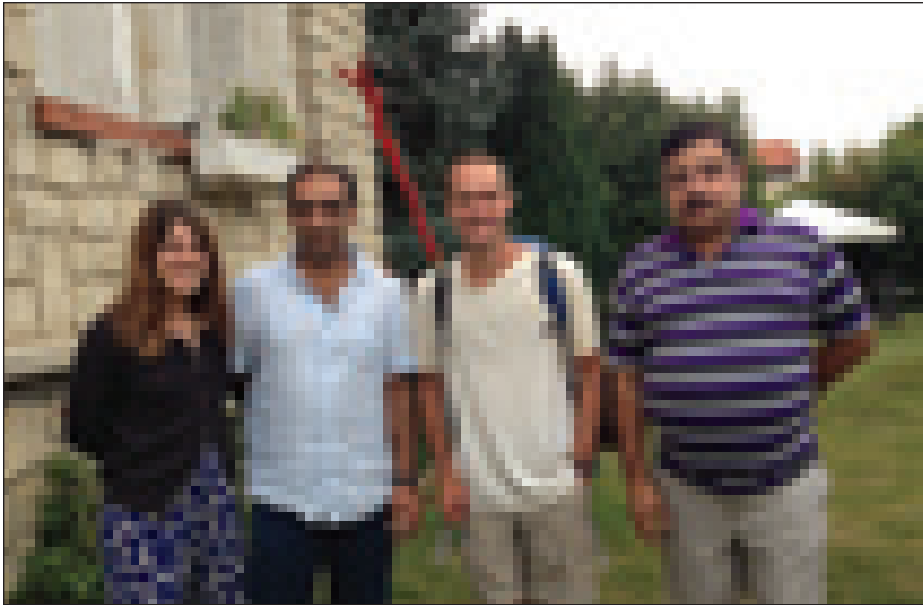
13 km | 2.5 hours | 1485 km in total | Airbnb with Abel

Pick up canal to the North of Loivre and follow it directly into Reims, turning into the city on the main D944 artery.

Last night, I stayed with Abel in his beautiful converted farmhouse. His family, visiting from Spain, London and Pakistan, welcomed me as if I were not a paying guest, but a visiting friend. I am astounded at the generosity of people, and hope I have repaid their hospitality sufficiently.

Today, as I arrive in Reims, the Cathedral's dark colours are like a dense black-hole around which the city revolves. The city is a slow and graceful place, but it seems overwhelmingly cosmopolitan to my eyes and feet: eyes and feet that have seen only fields of wheat, fields of corn and small, sheltered villages for weeks. It is amazing how quickly one normalises certain experiences. Indeed, I find it hard to remember a time I did not live my life this walking way. It's unsettling to contemplate how quickly my life has unravelled into this monotony of walking, of constant movement and being in a different bed every night.

This morning, as I set out, I looked at the fields as I passed and wondered what it would be like to walk into the middle of those stretching planes of vegetation and just disappear. Merge into all that growth and greenery and sink into the dirt and just be



still. Be wheat, be corn, be a rooted thing again. Never move again.

Instead, I call my husband and his sleepy voice draws me down the telephone to remember the light of my home, the smell of my life, the knowledge of where my things are, and I feel grounded. The further I get away from home, these grounding sparks seem to become more and more necessary.

I sit in the shadow of the Cathedral, thinking about this and a friend sends me a message: *I think of you daily covering those miles: how do you know which way to go? Whilst I can't be with you physically, I find that I am in spirit [but] it is only now I feel the need to communicate, as if the further you go from UK I need to have a thin piece of string tied to you so that you can find your way back!* I think of my friend's thin red thread, and of Sam's encouragement and of Rachael's constant support and of Karen and Caroline and of Matthew and Emma and all the thin, red threads that stretch towards me, tying me to a solid bit of land. If you bound each thread together, they become a rope of considerable strength and length.

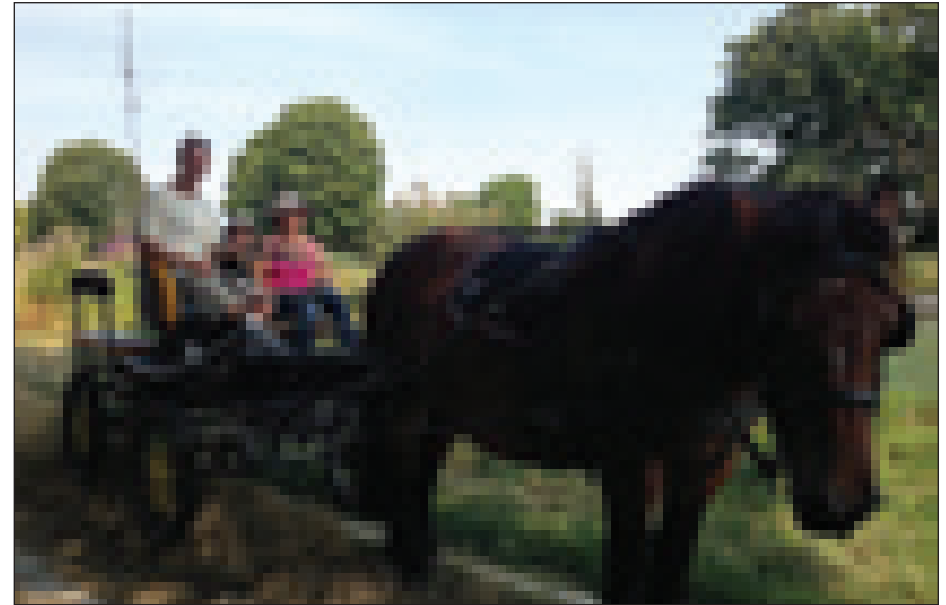
Flaming Lips – *Out For A Walk*

## Day 45: Reims to Les Petites Loges

23 km | 4 hours | 1508 km in total | City Apartment, Reims

Pick up canal, again, to the south of the city, crossing over to the south side after the N4 motorway bridge. Continue south/south east until Sept-Saulx, then turn south west into Les Petites Loges.

I walk along the dark, still canal. It is lined by empty grain silos and other skeletons of a long dead industry. Even the canal boats, that travel towards the bustling ports



in the north, are missing. I become aware that I am travelling in the wrong direction to the old boats: heading south, against the flow of the ghosts. I have been walking for three and a half hours, thinking about the long-gone industry when a horse-drawn carriage pulls into view. The horse is wide and squat and strong. I draw out my camera to document this other ancient mode of transport, and the carriage slows to a halt, the horse stopping in a perfect pose for my camera's click. The driver – a sprightly, charming woman – asks about my walk and I fumble through my explanation. She shrugs her shoulders in a generous gesture and invites me to ride with her for a few minutes, as a *gift of the road*, as she calls it. I explain that she is travelling in the wrong direction and that Venice is south. Without hesitation, she coaxes Perline (the horse) and her cart around, and pats the seat next to her, smiling. I step up warily, and suddenly we are galloping, Perline's hooves echoing back over the canal. I realise I am laughing. We travel like this for twenty minutes and she gestures for me to take the reins. I nudge Perline forward, and when we stop, we enjoy the scented breeze as we trot past a field of flowers. She is, I discover, going to the same village as me, and decides to take me straight to the front door of my hosts. I have never arrived *anywhere* by horse drawn coach! Afterwards, I begin to feel guilty that I did not walk that 5 km. Surely, I should have declined: walked every moment of the way? But isn't this experience the quintessence of this project: An exchange, a meeting of strangers. Discussions about life, art, generosity and human interaction.

In the garden of my welcoming hosts, I sit under a large antenna. Paul explains that it is for his Ham Radio and he shows me his radio suite in a beautiful salon decorated with ancient farming accoutrements: a yoke as a lampshade, a pitch fork resting quietly on the wall. In one corner, his technological equipment sits, shining with buttons, frequencies and invisible radio waves. He turns it on and reaches into the ether, explaining he is doing a demonstration for a visiting Scotsman, and asking

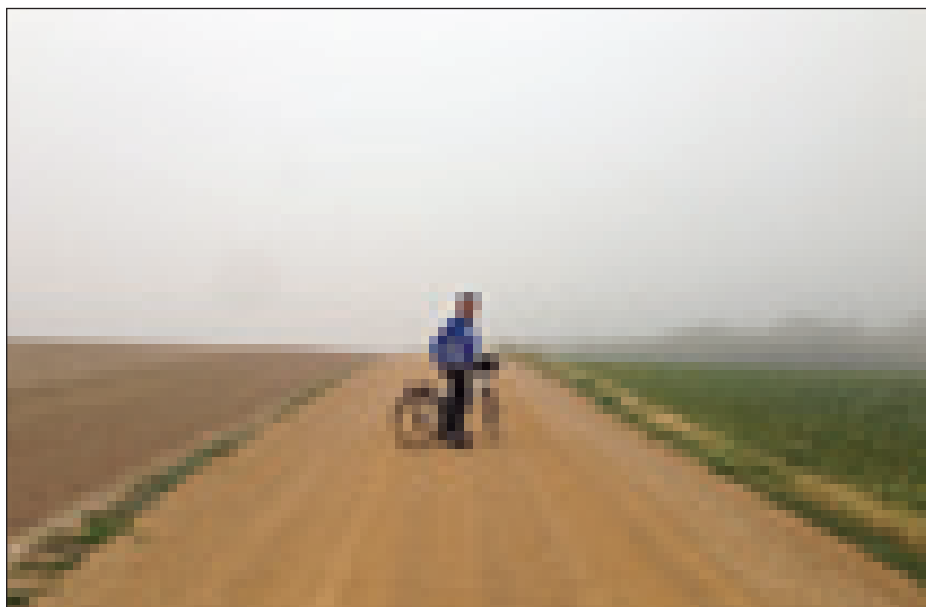
if anyone was there. A man outside of Toulouse answers back, crackling through the sparks of the hot atmosphere. He speaks about who he is, his life, and then, turning to English, he wishes me well on my journey. Paul then shows me his other equipment, including a Morse-code machine. He beeps a few lines out into the world, spelling my name and echoing it across the airwaves for anyone who chooses to listen or respond. The past, it appears, is alive and well, and fully functioning.

Chet Baker – *Sentimental Walk*

## Day 46: Les Petites Loges to Châlons-en-Champagne

30 km | 7 hours | 1538 km in total | Les Trilogues

South West through Les Petites Loges and through l'Orme, zig-zagging through Billy-le-Grand and Vaudemange. South to Isse, crossing the river, and south again to Aigny, meeting another canal. Take the south side path all the way to Saint-Martin-sur-le-Pre, and cross into Châlons-en-Champagne.



Today is quiet – the clouds have tumbled down almost to the ground. Not wet, just misty. This morning I set off into the mist, quietly, so as to not wake anyone. I see Paul through the fog on his bicycle: he just wants to make sure I am okay, and when he's certain I'm fine, he turns back along the dusty path and waves me off. I walk on in silence for the rest of the day: it is a day for images rather than words. I spend most of the morning thinking about yesterday.

Yesterday, later in the afternoon, the lady who had the horse drawn cart showed up

(in a car) at Paul and Nicola's house and invited to show me the '*bois especial*' (special trees) of the area. How could I resist? She drove me up to the special forest that sat atop the vineyard hills. The trees were indeed special, and it is one of only three forests like it in the world: one other in Sweden and another in Germany. Through genetics, or environment or by magic, the trees grow gnarled, twisted, curved, in various shapes and sizes. They grow holes in their branches, spin their leaves in twisted ways, drop twigs of strange shapes on the ground below. We walked in the late afternoon sunlight and on the way down, we stopped and looked at the Champagne vineyards, and she told me about viniculture. Her family have lived in the area for generations and have a long history with the grapes of the area. She explained how they grow rosebushes next to the grapevines, because pests attack the rosebushes before they attack sturdier vines. In that way, the farmer can use the rosebush as a sort of canary in a mine, singing out in colour, and when the flowers die, the farmer knows something is wrong.

On returning me back to my hosts, a walker I met earlier yesterday morning was outside talking to my Ham Radio-loving host. After talking to me, he had searched for me online, and read about Paul's interest in Ham Radio and was also interested in such things. He had looked up Paul's unique radio locator (F5JSQ) that I had listed and decided to track him down: to say hello and share the enthusiasm for their hobby.

It is strange to think that I am forming connections between people because I am walking, but perhaps that is proof of the project's social nature, and its interconnectivity. This is even stranger considering I am in another country and I spend most of my time alone, walking.

Willie Nelson – *On The Road Again*



## Day 47: Châlons-en-Champagne to Vitry-le-François

37 km | 7.5 hours | 1575 km in total | Airbnb with Sophie Bluy

Finding the canal, again, follow south east until it enters Vitry. Be careful to stay on the south side. An easy path today, as you leave the canal.

Today, I hardly speak a single word.  
It rains and rains horrifically.  
I see no one until I arrive at the edge of Brienne-le-Château, and I huddle under an awning, trying to find where my host lived.  
I say my first word at 5pm. My voice is hoarse and I croak like a crow.  
Sometimes, walking is so silent that I disappear.

The Ting Tings – *We Walk*

## Day 48: Vitry-le-François to Brienne-le-Château

42 km | 7.75 hours | 1617 km in total | Airbnb with Adeline

South to Frignicourt, following minor roads to Blaise-sous-Arzillières and Arzillières-Nouvelle and into Gigny-Bussy, then Brandonvillers. Just west of this, join the major highway D396 – be careful! – but follow in straight line for many km, until Rosnay-l'Hôpital. After that, veer south east to Perthes-lès-Brienne.

I meet three people today doing the same route as me. The Via Francigena links Canterbury to Rome, and is an ancient pilgrimage path, though not one that goes to Padua. It fell out of fashion in the 1700's, and there is no actual path, but the rough route between the towns stills exists, which is what these people are following. The first two people I meet, a couple, are methodically doing sections of the route every year: last year, they completed Canterbury to Arras, this year they will reach St Maurice in Switzerland, and next year, they'll do the final stretch. The other chap – a bright, attractive man with a tea-towel around his neck like a scarf – is idly roaming northwards, tracing the path up towards Britain from Florence, with no set path, no specific destination, but rather roaming, wandering, letting the landscape guide him, being free. I tell him to go to Scotland and give it my love.

They are all cycling, not walking. I tell each of them that it seems like a much easier way to travel. A fourth person (also



cycling) stops to talk to me and tells me he is a local restaurateur. He guesses I am a 'pilgrim' from The Damned Stick, and tells me to wander to the next town over and see a 900-year-old abbey. I smile and nod, but I know I won't be taking any more steps than necessary. Today, you see, is my seventh day of walking in a row and I am in desperate need of a break. This fact alone, perhaps, explains why I have so few thoughts on the road today.

It is a 'tank' day, where I put my head down and take step after step after step, looking up barely to see the road, let alone the destination. I notice very little, though, I am sure the scenery is beautiful. It makes me think, once I have sat down, of all the beautiful sights I have seen and those I haven't. In our daily, 'normal' lives, we see the same things over and over again – our house, our street, our usual path to work. Every day, I have been exposed to new vistas and sights and views. And yet, I remember so few of them. I remember a road somewhere before St Erme. And the hill when I left Kirkby Stephen. And the canal outside Milton Keynes. But there has been so much more that I have seen: all different and unique and beautiful or strange, and I wonder why I cannot recall every single sight. I feel I should be able to – it seems important that I do. It makes me think of that false notion that we only use 1/10th of our brain. I know this is not true, but it helps to explain where the rest of the images I've seen have gone: they're stored somewhere in rest of those 9/10ths. Every turn in the path, every sheep and tree, every view and vision – they must be in there somewhere... right?

Angelo Badalamenti – *Fire Walk With Me*

## Day 49: Brienne-le-Château to Bar-sur-Aube

26 km | 5 hours | 1643 km in total | Hotel Les Voyageurs

South to Brienne-le-Vieille, following farming roads parallel to D936, all the way to Juvaneze. Cross the river here, then take small roads to Jessains, veering into Bossancourt, meeting the D619 to go through the towns of Arsonval, Montier-en-l'Isle, Ailleville and finally into Bar-sur-Aube.

When I was seventeen, I worked in Switzerland for a year and one of my lasting memories is of the sunflower fields. My young, melodramatic self was quite enamoured by these bright things, human-like in the way they lifted their heads towards the sunshine, moving their yellow faces to follow the warmest glow. I remember them tall, buzzing in their colour. I thought I would encounter them as I walked through France in August and was looking forward to them. I stumble upon my first crop today. But instead of the memory of my youth, they have already finished their flowering and are withering and brown, their heads hung, bowed and exhausted. I notice, too, distant trees have already begun to hint at autumn – reddening leaves and a slow shedding. The wheat has all been harvested; the rape-seed all cropped and cut; the corn is losing its green.

Before I left Huntly, I remember hearing that scientists had discovered a way to track the speed of a season. Spring, apparently, moved north at 2 miles an hour. When I heard this, I thought it would be an interesting project if someone could walk from the south of Britain upwards, walking the same speed and direction as springtime, walking like Persephone, flowers blooming in each footstep and birds singing. One could walk a landscape waking up.



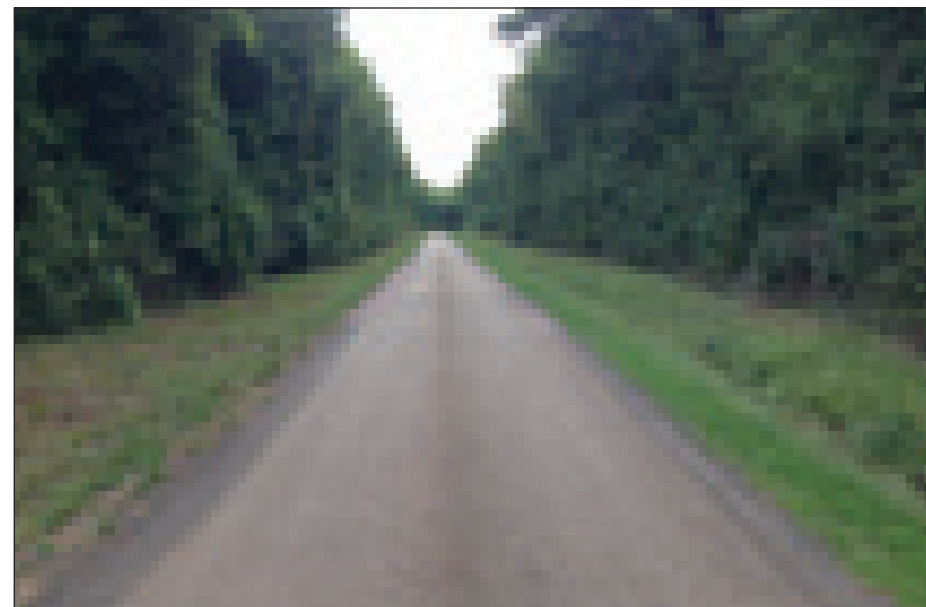
## Section 8: Arc-en-Barrois to Ornans



### Day 51: Arc-en-Barrois to Jorquenay

30 km | 5.5 hours | 1716 km in total | Airbnb with Emil

Trace the logging roads straight east of Arc-en-Barrois, ending in Ternat. Due east to Ormancey, then south to Mardor, and due east to the lake/reservoir at Saint-Ciergues. From there, wend upwards, parallel to the river La Mouche to Humes, and from there, less than 500 m to Jorquenay.



I am a child of techno-music, and while this isn't the only music I love, it is formative. I adore its cycles and repeated rhythms; its meditative loops. I try to limit the time I am 'plugged in' to music while walking: I find it overwhelming – too much stimulus – but today, I play some of this old electronic music and find myself lost in the different arcs of interacting circles of sound. Large and small loops, big and little beats, all rotating and repeating into something I find physically meditative.

The music gets me thinking of circles and repetition and of the different ways that I am repeating. Physical circles like the cycle of my feet onto the path: the motion of my knees lifting and falling. Or the action cycles like the morning ritual of packing the backpack, repeated; the checking of maps and routes; the endless meeting of new people and endless repeating of the explanation; the blogging ritual; the finding food ritual; the postcard ritual; the calling husband ritual; the unpacking ritual; the waking up again ritual. In the past weeks, even the landscape has repeated: ploughed wheat-field, growing corn, harvested turnips, ploughed wheat-field, growing corn, harvested turnips, also repeated. And then a small village repeats about every 1.4 hours, the



same small collection of red-roofed houses and the same collection of curious people who look at me in the same suspicious way. The only difference is the variance of the faces or the type of brick the buildings use. In fact, the only way I am not cycling through a series of repeated actions is because I move forward. I corkscrew, or helix through time. Going around, repeating, but the location is different.

I find this exceptionally difficult. It is the most difficult part of this entire project: avoiding monotony. I try to focus on what is not the same. Today is different from yesterday because I think of circles. Today, I stop and write this note down in a bus-shelter because my host for tonight does not return from work for another two hours, so I wait. Today, I have lunch at a lakeside and think it is a pleasant place to stop.

Tomorrow, undoubtedly, there will be more rituals and repeated actions. Thinking about this, I balk at the thought of doing it again... but I realise that this is the case in a non-walking life too: we have our repeated cycles and rituals. We work well within them. The trick, I suppose, is not letting them overwhelm. So, I walk. Tomorrow, I will have moved forward in time and space, despite the circles.

The Police – *Walking On The Moon*

## Day 52: Jorquenay to Les Archots (Chalindrey)

19 km | 5 hours | 1735 km in total | Couchsurfing with Anthony

Follow the Canal from Jourquenay south east for about 12 km, until St Maurice where the canal ends. South to Saint-Vallier-sur-Marne, then south east to Chalindrey.

Follow the D136 road over railway, then sharp right, then first left, and follow small road to Les Archots.



This morning, along the canal, the sun edges over the hill, causing mist to form just above the water. Three large birds-of-prey flap slowly down the dark green water's path, disturbing the gentle fog into whorls and swirls. It is beautiful enough to stop me in my tracks.

These past few weeks have been difficult due to the monotony of the endless flat terrain. I am looking forward to the Alps, if only because they will be something different. A friend calls me to suggest that I think of the project like a film, where the Alps will be the 'climax'. This gets me thinking about narrative structure and how stories are told in ways that have beginnings, middles and ends. A listener will only feel complete once given all three. I am, I realise, somewhere in the middle of this story, even if I'm not entirely sure

what the story is about. It has themes, certainly: movement, travel, people, distance, perseverance and the shifting nature of place. I believe it is about a poetic gesture. I hope it is about more than just me and my experiences.

Yesterday, my lovely Couchsurfing host – also called Anthony – dropped into casual conversation that the house contained many guns, and not to be scared. He was a champion pistol shooter, and it was with pride he showed me the accoutrements of his hobby, including rifles and other guns that looked like they had come from the future. He showed me the .22 calibre bullets he used, and they were greasy to the touch. I asked why and he explained that this was so they came out of the barrel faster.

In my mid-morning break today, I sit on the side of the road, resting, and a large, green truck rattles and races around the corner. It slows when it sees me, and through the thick glass, I see the driver smile and make the sign of the cross. He gives me a thumbs-up and a toot of his horn as his truck hurtles past.

Later, searching for tonight's hosts – Le Gite Des Archots – I get lost. Where the map shows his place should be, is actually an equestrian centre, where four listless horses lie resting in the field, swatting flies away with their tails. I call the proprietor for directions and he asks me what I can see. I say: *Horses*. He laughs and says: *Attend, j'arrive*. In a moment, he appears in a bright orange car, shirtless and jovial, joking and laughing. I get in his car, and as we set off down the pot-holed road, speaking three languages at once – bits of French, English and German – our words bounce around like my backpack on the backseat of his car.

The Cramps – *The Way I Walk*

## Day 53: Les Archots (Chalindrey) to Champlitte

24 km | 4.5 hours | 1759 km in total | Gite Des Archots Chambre d'Hôtes

Staying close to the river La Resaigne, follow either farm paths or larger roads, running near Violot, and through Rivières-le-Bois, Grandchamp, Maatz, Coublanc, Lefond, Montarlot-Les-Champlitte, then Champlitte.

The days are getting shorter. At the start, the day would begin itself at 4am, but now, as I stir at 6am – my muscles twitching their painful *Good Morning* – the sky still clings onto an inconclusive night.

The distances are getting shorter too, but, as a result, I have fewer break days ahead of me. This wasn't a conscious choice, but it seems to make more sense to do less length over more days, rather than pushing through excessive amounts and then sitting still and shattered for a day, useless and in pain. So, the next few weeks are 'easy', but constant. There also seems to be fewer places to find food, so my pack is heavier as I carry all I need to eat for two or three days at a time. It makes the hills difficult.

But...Hills! It is a pleasure to not tread the same flat terrain, and instead drift up and down. It is such a joy to be able to look down on a road, once I have climbed up. Perhaps that is what is exhausting about the flatness, that one has no scope of reference; no way to be able to judge one's current position with one's past or future. With hills, one can look back with accomplishment or look forward, even if it is with dread and fear at having to go up. I am able to see difference, not only in the







landscape, but in my achievements: they mark time in a way that the flatness cannot.

At some point, I see a fox, skinny as a rag, snuffling at something in the middle of a field. I think it is the first fox I've seen. He seems unfazed by my presence, looking towards me, then looking back to his quarry, but keeping one ear on my continuous marching steps. It is not until I am 10 metres away that he decides to run, scampering quicker than I can bring my camera up. He skitters underneath a bush, but peers out, hidden and safe from any threat I may have been.

Later, between two hills, in the quiet purgatory of a flat, hot plain, a black, big buzzard circles above me. Or, at least, near enough above me to make me nervous: I didn't think I had become THAT skinny. But perhaps he has just spotted something

running away from my loud steps, because he stays circling that spot long after I begin my climbing up another hill, eventually circling down into a sudden, quick, taloned grab, then diving back into the blue.

Laura Marling – *Rambling Man*

## Day 54: Champlitte to Dampierre-sur-Salon

16 km | 3.5 hours | 1775 km in total | Airbnb with Pascal

Head south east, parallel to the D-67 road, veering off towards Framont, Achey, Delain, and Denevre, and into Dampierre-sur-Salon from north west.

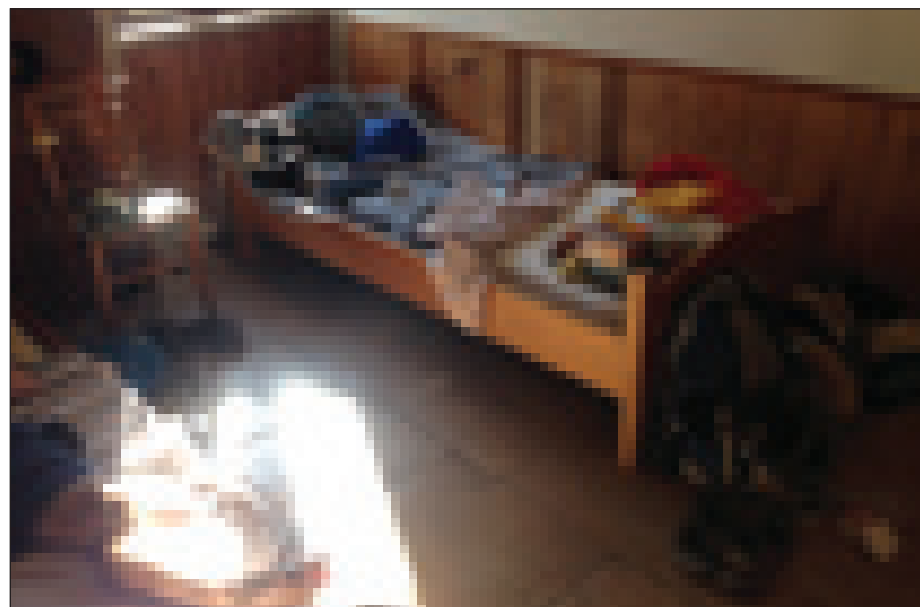
Last night, I met my first pilgrim. Or at least, my first fellow walking pilgrim doing the whole Via Francigena in one go. I have met cyclists and others who were doing the route in yearly stages, but Franz is the first person I have met doing the whole walking process, from Canterbury to Rome. We compare notes, blisters, shoes and experiences. It throws into sharp relief the loneliness of the past weeks. It is also fascinating to see his resources and hear his reasons and how they differ from mine. (I think I have also been subconsciously hoarding things, as my pack seems almost double the weight of his. Tomorrow, I will do a culling of useless things. Again.) We stay in the same small room of a guest-house for pilgrims, talking through the tiredness until we both drift off to sleep.

Through speaking to him, I realise that a pilgrimage must, at base, be a journey of self-reflection. Perhaps this is why I have found it so difficult to talk about it in terms of 'art'. For me, art always involves a conversation, a shared experience, and something outward-facing. The processes I have been going through have been inward-facing,

and it can feel overwhelmingly pretentious to present that as art, as it seems more of a process of self-discovery. Why would it be interesting to anyone else what is going on in my head and my heart? Perhaps this is why it is enjoyable to talk with Franz, as it takes all of my insular experiences and makes them shared, makes them external, and somehow names the otherwise silent beasts inside me.

Meeting Franz also makes me realise how lonely I have been: I have, for a while now, been collecting photographs of 'faces in things' – trees with gnarled faces, houses that look happy, rocks that seem to smile. Perhaps I have been doing this because I am seeking out company: actively looking for people to talk to, and searching out sentience in every manner of object. I won't tell you how many times I have spoken to the trees or cows or birds or even the road itself. For someone whose practice is essentially working with people I find spending much of the day alone challenging. But the joy of seeing a face in a wash-house or a building or a smudge on the road gives a giggle to the day. It makes the landscape feel alive, and less lonely, as if all the inanimate objects are watching or cheering me along or questioning and criticising me: as if they are all having conversations with me. They stay still, and I move, but we unravel this internal process in an external way, together.

Val Doonican – *Walk Tall*



## Day 55: Dampierre Sur Salon to Gy

22 km | 4.5 hours | 1797 km in total | Airbnb Family Stievenart

South to Autet, crossing River Saône to Quitteur, then east, following farming roads towards Motey-en-Soane. Follow logging roads through the woods to Igny, then south to Angirey, Citey, then D-23 into Gy.

My hosts for the last few nights – Edith and Marc – have gone above and beyond the call of duty to feed me; to show me around the local sights; to introduce me to local delicacies; and to welcome me into their family with humour and charm. Even Juki, the family dog, gnaws on my borrowed slippers as if I belong there. They do not need to go to such levels of hosting, and I am continually dumbstruck by the kindness and goodness of strangers. I keep thinking what an imposition it must be for a non-native French speaker to enter someone's home, to arrive stinky from a day's walk, to explain (poorly, I'm sure) what I'm doing at their home, to continually conjugate verbs incorrectly, to use the wrong words and to interrupt the family rhythm because I don't know where things are or how to do things. But, truly, I am welcomed as one of their own.



During the many meals with them (they even make me escargots!) they tell me of their fascinating family: several artists and painters, a grandfather who was a wood carver who repaired ancient church sculptures, the children are musicians and singers and athletes and scientists. There is an aunt in her 70's who had survived a terrible traffic accident, and a friend who is a designer. They also tell me of their family hobby of fireworks – *Le Feu Artifice*. They design and set-off firework displays

and I find a beautiful poetry in their shared joy for exploding things into bright, vibrant colours. Indeed, such a hobby almost acts as a metaphor for their ability to be such good hosts. Fireworks are complicated, delicate things, but so resilient, so joyfully explosive, and provide such pleasure to others.

What will be the hardest to communicate in this entire project is the scope of human experience that I encounter. Rachael recently wrote to me: *I think the actual line you are walking is the project and can stand for and allow each aspect within to be connected up. The line is the project network and each thing/happening, from the Scotland/England sign, to the grenade on the ground, to planting the oak in Venice, are actors surrounding this. But it all comes back to that line. And the line allows connections to these experiences and things.*

Indeed, the line of this project – the very path – goes straight through the home of Edith and Marc. It is practically one of the anchors that links it to the ground. In such a way, I can only hope that the link to all the others who have been so welcoming – so hospitable and so generous – is a porous and durable one that passes the love back upwards, back to the kindness of other strangers, friends and loved ones.

Meredith Monk – *Walking Song*

## Day 56: Gy to Emagny

14 km | 3 hours | 1811 km in total | Villa della Robbia

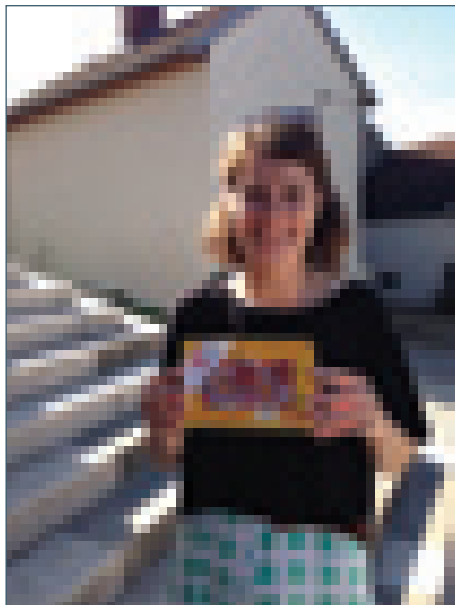
Use farm/logging roads to run parallel to D-12 roads, walking through forests. On meeting D225 road, turn onto it and head east to Autoreille, and follow it as it becomes D-11 towards Pin, then curving down in Emagny.

Last night, in the gold of late evening sunshine, when the day slips warmly into the gentle wind of early evening, I was invited by my host to enjoy a glass of pale rosé wine on the terrace. We talked about many things, but the thing that stuck with me was the discussion about colour: the music of colour, the history of colour, the meaning and symbols of colour.

There, surrounded by the sumptuous decoration of the 15th – 18th century house, the pale greys and calm blues of this house shimmering in the yellow-reds of the setting sun, I suddenly realised that I was relaxed. Similarly, today, on my brief and easy sojourn, my dear friend Catrin Jeans meets me at the church steps with some Tunnock's Teacakes. She has come to walk with me for three days, and I've never been so glad to see such Scottishness. We sit under the shade of a fragrant tree. I compare this with the soggy, long-distance days of the Yorkshire Dales, or the endless heat of the North of France, or the suburban hell outside London: it is only right to accept the difficult with the soft.

Today, for the first time, I see the foothills of the Alps, blue and calling, in the distance. Tall and gigantic, but just the foothills. Looking at the map later, I realise that the curvature of the earth hides the tallness and ruggedness of the real mountains. There, behind the rotation of an entire planet, lies the 'climax' of this walk: the Great St Bernard's Pass, and I feel my feet chomping to get into these hills.

Perhaps, however, it is wrong to think of the Alps as the climax. The Alps are only



the next climax – *une petite denouement*. There is a bigger endpoint that I must try to remember: Venice. In so many ways, I've ignored – or consciously forgotten – this destination, if only to cope with the enormity of the undertaking. Perhaps this is a metaphor for how all artists function: we focus on the day-to-day in order to not think about the 'destination', because it can be too big or difficult to consider in its entirety. This is perhaps a human thing, not just artists. But, it also seems like a good idea... as long as one looks up from looking down once in a while. So, I look up and see the mountains looming in the distance, and ask myself if that is really the direction I want to go. My feet say: yes.

Tiesto – *Walking On Clouds*

## Day 57: Emagny to Besançon (Via Miserey)

20 km | 5 hours | 1831 km in total | Hotel Rosaboneur

Parallel to D-8 motorway and into woods to the south east of Emagny. Cross railway, and use old railway path south east to Miserey. Wend, wiggle and zig-zag through École-Valentin and Quartier, down into Besançon, crossing over the river into the heart of the city.

I have asked Catrin to write this entry – if only to have a different voice than my own. She writes:

*My relationship to walking is pretty blasé – it takes me to the places I like, amongst countryside and wildlife or places I need to go, à la work or to play. I'd never consider myself a walker. Rather walking is a means of getting about. Walking used to be my time for considering what the day ahead might entail, for creating task-lists and reorganising my duties to come. Walking allowed space to generate and establish ideas and reflect on projects I was undertaking. Ironically, this stopped when I moved to the small town of Huntly to join the Deveron Arts and Walking Institute team. My walk to work decreased to two and a half minutes. My walk to the train station decreased to five minutes. My walk to the pool decreased to one minute. Walking changed to a recreational pursuit, always practised in the company of others. Something was lost in this switch and I often long for space to allow my body and mind to wander.*

*And this leads me to Anthony – I was worried he might have the opposite problem with too much time to think. I'm the first walking companion to join him in France meaning he has been walking for around 30 days on his own. Flying solo, he tells me,*



*across the (nearly) endless flat roads of rural France for 30 days. Meeting only two walkers along the way. I've got to admit I was worried about what state I'd find him in and whether he'd have questioned himself to death with self-reflective critique around this project.*

*Fortunately, I can report that I find him in good health, mentally and physically. After a full morning of enjoyable walking we sit down, replenishing our sugar levels with an ice cold cola. Anthony takes a sip, acknowledging the calorific content, he comments: 'everything in moderation', Mr Schrag, I can't help but giggle.*

John Cage – *Water Walk*

## Day 58: Besançon to Ornans

25 km | 5 hours | 1856 km in total | Airbnb with Catrin

Follow east arm of the river, south, then climb up south of La Citadelle, then through the small village of Chapelle des Buis. Head towards Morre, but hairpin back to head downhill, crossing the N-57 motorway into La Veze. After this, follow old paths almost in a straight line through Le Baraquet, Les Cloutiers, and into Tarcenay. Here, join the D-67 motorway, being careful, and follow this all the way into Ornans.

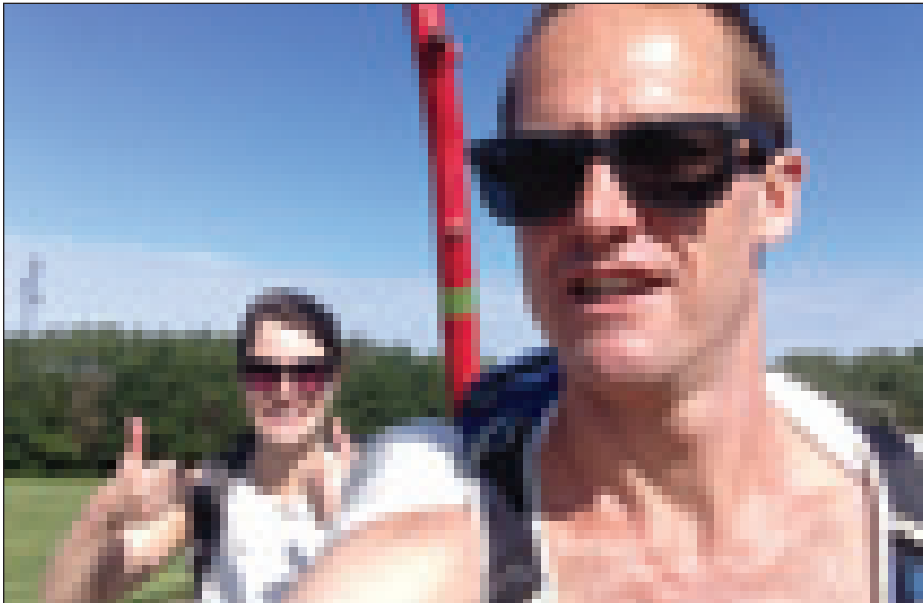
Climbing out of Besançon, Catrin and I encounter the first real hill I've seen since Yorkshire. The sort of hill that makes you lean into it, walking at a different angle, as if using gravity to pull you forward, upwards. At the top, Franz – my fellow pilgrim from a few weeks ago – calls out from a window. He heard us nattering away in English and raced out to find me. We embrace and laugh: he arrived last night, also with a friend visiting from the UK. I like the idea that we will weave in and out of each other's path for the next month or

so, like braided rivers running different courses, but in a similar direction.

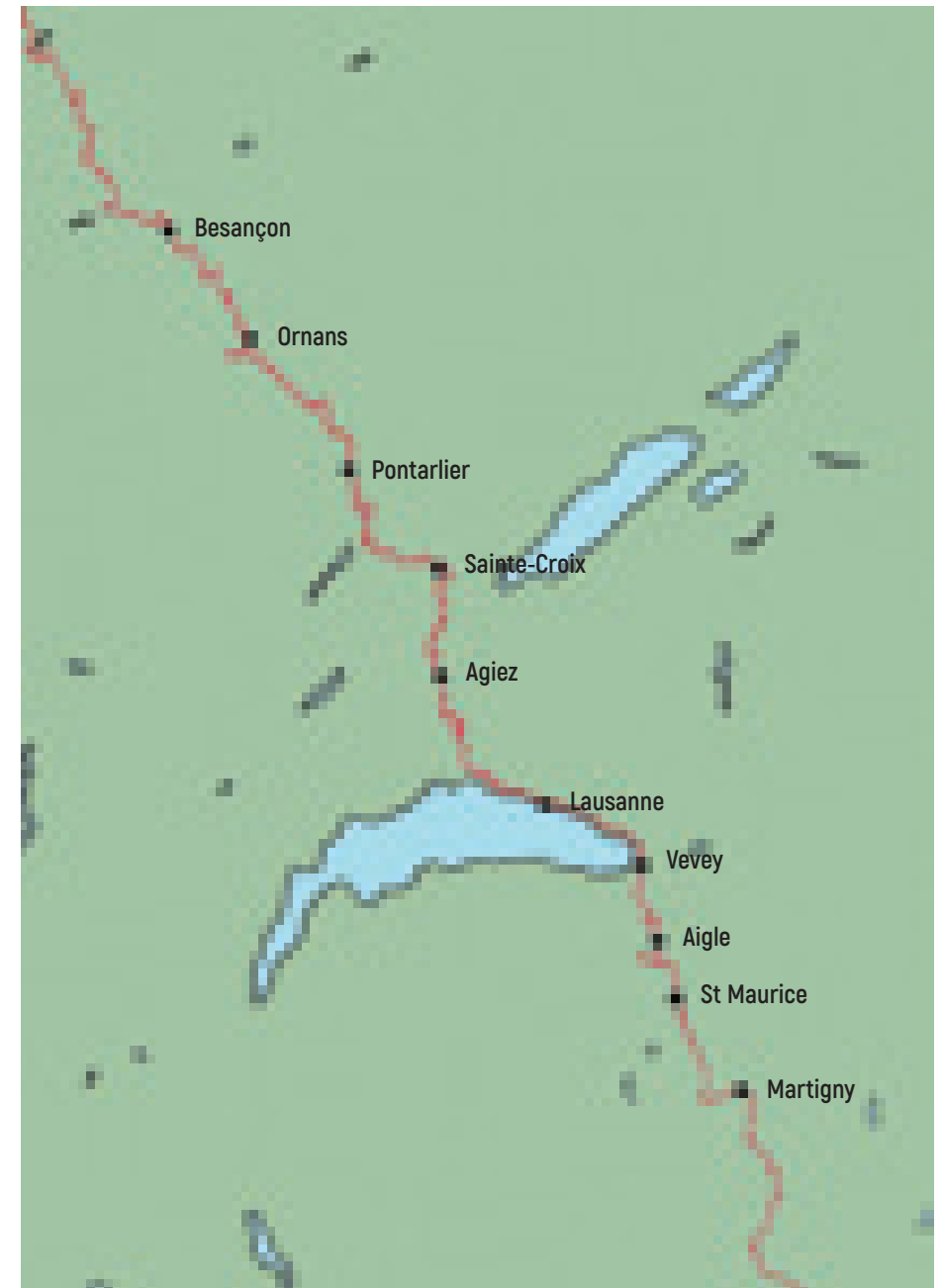
Walking with someone again is an adjustment after all these days alone, but it is wonderful to have someone to bounce ideas off, to sing silly songs with, to play word-games with. The time passes quickly, and the hill(s) have indeed been tough but we are able to push each other onwards. At one point, I turn north and wave at every person who has become part of this project (did you see me?). In between our panting and sweating, Cat and I talk about many things: her practice, mine, this project, where art lies, what art does – my usual artistic gripes. She says, at one point: *art comes from the story that is behind you*. This line sings in my heart, and I have to stop and write it down. She's right, too. The things that inform you, inform one's understanding of art. But the quote means more than that to me. We had just come over a small hill and I could see the stretch of path ahead of us, long and barren and empty. I had been thinking about the notion of hills and being able to see where I had walked, who I had met – and who was behind me. Her sentence illustrates how the core of this project is all the exchanges with all those behind me, not necessarily the endpoint in front of me.

She says that I am like a giant pencil, drawing the path with my feet, and in that, I am doing what all artists do and grow from: making a mark on the world. I am not sure this is utterly true, but I agree that for now, in regards to this project, my footprints are indeed like scribbles onto the world. Size 7.5 steps that lead from the north of Scotland to Venice. It is possibly the most boring drawing to look at, but, the story behind it begins to give it such incredible form. I leave Catrin in the centre of Ornans, after we have cooled our feet in a river. She goes north soon, and I will be the story behind her. Neither she nor I know the ending of that story yet, but I hope it's a good story.

Patti Smith – *Walkin' Blind*



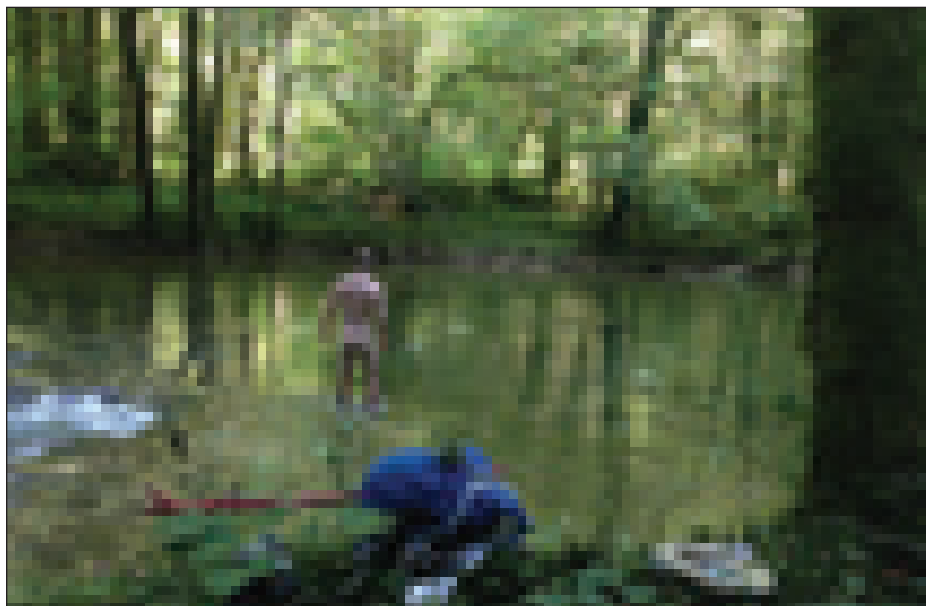
## Section 9: Ornans to Martigny



## Day 59: Ornans to Pontarlier

37 km | 10 hours | 1893 km in total | Airbnb with Dominique

Take Rue de l'Isle aux Pretres, south of Montgesoye, the Rue Achay to Vuillafans, then Chemin de Campaloux to Moulins Neufs. After Lods, follow river La Loue as much as possible as paths appear/disappear until finding Chemin des Moulins, follow this until source of la Loue, flowing out of pure rock. South to Ouhans, over the woods south east to meet with E-23 motorway. Use farm roads to get you to Vuillecin, then directly south into Pontarlier.



I climb over three very big hills today, with over 900 metres of ascent, in total. In hot 34-degree Celsius heat.

And I get lost.

Twice.

Because of this, some of the day features what my family in Africa used to call *bundu-bashing*: hacking one's way through the bush, creating a path, leaving a wake of broken branches and flattened plants. To find my path, I know I need to trace the river, follow it up until its source, and so I use the rushing of the water as a map, hoping it will guide me to a safer place.

At one point, I am lowering myself down a small cliff with a branch when it snaps and I fall, tumbling down the dirt and landing on my phone, smashing it. I lie in the decaying leaves and silence and realise that no one in the world knows where I am. I could have fallen a bit deeper into the soft silt, and no one would find me for generations. There are no tracks nearby: there is only forest all around me, and only

the river would carry my final breaths.

It is sobering. And so I get up, and walk, carefully, following the river, until the forest broadens out, and the river becomes shallow pools. After near-death, I need a life-affirming experience, so strip down and go skinny-dipping in the frigid waters. The cool water stings my cuts and bruises and I stand, naked, in the shallows for thirty minutes, wondering where I am and what on earth I am doing.

Eventually, I find the path and it leads me to a clearing where a wide, tall cliff wall stretches out of the forest. At the base of this wall, the river flows out of a cave: its source. The river is being born from stone and welling-up from the dark insides of the earth, like a god had hollowed the clay of history and cried this river into existence. It feels almost religious.

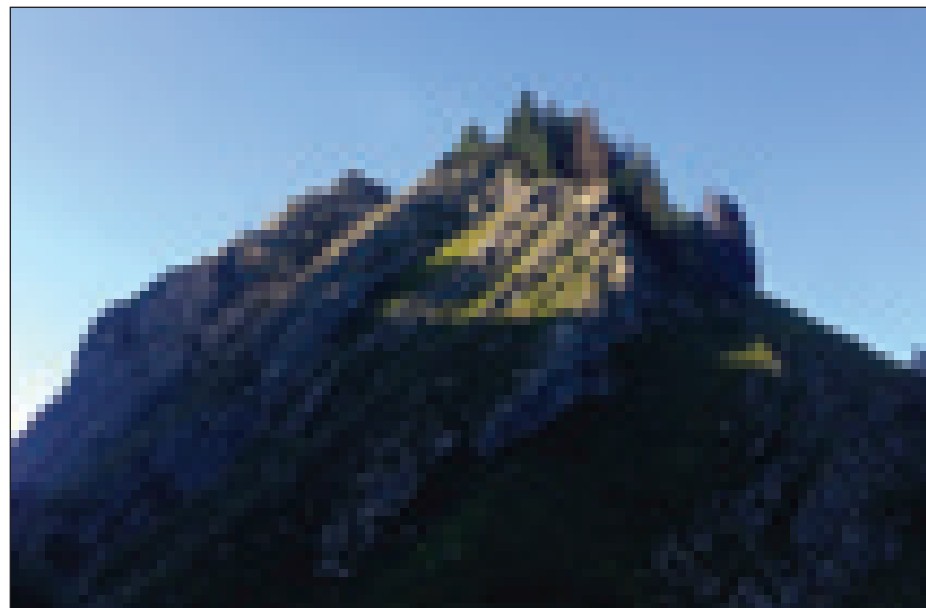
Hot Chip – *Over and Over*

## Day 60: Pontarlier to Sainte-Croix

24 km | 6.5 hours | 1917 km in total | Ibis Hotel Pontarlier

South of Pontarlier there are small roads that follow the river Le Doubs and run parallel to N-57 highway: use these to get to La Cluse. Turn towards La Tuilerie and La Gauffre. Then up, into Les Petits Fourgs du Haut and Les Fourgs. Cross over into Switzerland using D-6 highway. Follow into Auberson and the Grand Rue into Sainte-Croix.

Today, I leave France and climb up into the verdant Swiss hills. Cow bells reach out through between the trees, linger on the wind and echo off reaching pines. This is the land of my Dad: when I was seventeen, I went to seek out these roots and live on the





side of a Swiss mountain, learning Schweizerdeutsch and eating lots of cheese. I worked in a kitchen, fell in love with a long-haired Swiss boy, and learned a bit about myself, who I was, or who I could be. I was a melodramatic youth, and while it was a difficult year, it was formative and shaped me.

And being here, now, standing at the edge of the hills, looking out towards the future, with The Broken Stick and The Oak, I wonder how this walk has changed and shaped me. Today, it is Day 60 of walking and it seems unfathomable to me that I have walked for that long. How has all that time affected me? When I get home, will I have normalised that 6am rise and pack and stretch? Will I be walking in my sleep? Will I find I am constantly reaching for a non-existent map? Will my wonderful husband find me happier or just thinner? Or both?

I find it hard to think about how I have changed and it will probably only come into sharp relief once I return to the life I had before I left. Speculating, I'd say that I have aged: that much is obvious from the receding hair-line and the sun-induced wrinkles. I also think I've become calmer: that is either daily exhaustion, or that the knowledge of what I can actually accomplish lessens the drive in me to constantly prove I can do more. And I think I've become happier with my writing, which is strange, since when I left Switzerland at age eighteen, I left in the hopes of becoming a melodramatic poet... And now I return, I find myself turning back to words that I'd left in favour of 'art'.

Walking towards Venice – specifically, the Venice Biennale – I need to remind myself of that 'art'. It has, in perhaps an expected way, dropped by the wayside as the practicalities and the process of engagements became more important. To me, the social relationships with people along the way – the human exchanges – have become the art, and the actual endpoint (The Venice Biennale) becomes just an endpoint in the journey in the same way that most journeys have an endpoint. Perhaps it's true of all journeys: the endpoint doesn't matter, and it is what happens along the way, how it changes you, how it changes others – and what you can do with that – that really matters.

The Brian Johnestown Massacre – *Straight Up and Down*

## Day 61: Sainte-Croix to Agiez

24 km | 4 hours | 1941 km in total | Airbnb with Claire-Lise

Follow the pedestrian path down the valley, into Vuiteboeuf, then south west into Baulmes. After that, south to Rances, and zig-zag on farming roads to Orbe, crossing the river and then south west to Agiez.

During a mid-morning rest, I am gently massaging my calves when I notice that they are warm. Very warm. Other parts of my legs and body are not so hot, so I am curious as to why only my calves are pulsating with heat. It is as if they are extruding heat, like a computer's fan.

This gets me thinking about how much the body – my body – has become mechanised through this process: its daily exertion; its rote motion; its schedule of stretches and rests. In some ways, having an understanding of this process might be the only way to truly understand this project: all the words, images, videos or even explanations I try to give would never amount to anything other than a representation



of this corporality. The anthropologist Michael Jackson talks about a 'physical truth' in experiencing life. I'm not sure I am comfortable with this idea of a physical truth of this process. As I've said before, there are many (hopefully lucid) truths to the work: the social exchanges, the reflections on changing land-use, the understanding of movement through spaces, the psycho-geography of a human existing and moving through the environment. As such, the experience of my body (mechanised or not) is only one of the truths that can emerge, albeit an entirely localised truth to me that can only ever be seen from the outside.

The idea of this mechanisation isn't to suggest that my body is only a machine. It does have joy. It isn't all walking work. I start to think about other types of movement, for example when the body dances, it runs a different set of programmes, equally as rhythmic, equally as repetitive. What interests me when considering these different forms of action is the variation from when one is enjoyable, and when one is a chore. When something becomes a means to an end, and when it becomes a thing in-and-of itself. This, of course, relates to notions of leisure and the difference between 'leisure actions' and 'work actions'. Which of those is this walk, leisure or work? Perhaps, it is something else. I get up from my break and put my headphones in, turn on my music and find an extra kick in my steps, find the joy in the motion, and I shift to the music and not to the needs of the path. I smile more.

Perhaps the machine can learn to dance if the music is right, and not to just mimic and run a programme, but truly feel. A ghost in the machine?

Scott English – *High on A Hill*





## Day 62: Agiez to Lausanne

30 km | 7 hours | 1971 km in total | Julien Kaech

As much as you can, follow side roads from Agiez to Bofflens, east to Arnex-sur-Orbe, south to Pompaples, Eclepens, Lussery-Villars, Penthalaz, and cross over Motorway 9 at Sullens. Run parallel to motorway into Villars-Sainte-Croix and Crissier, turning east into Renens and into Lausanne.

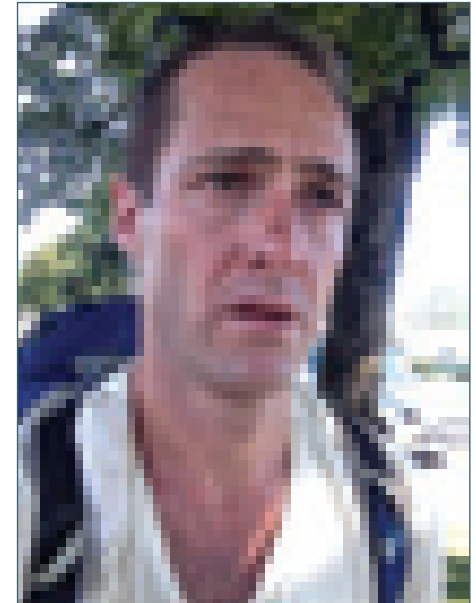
Early this morning, just as the sun is peeking over the hill behind me, I jet quickly along the side of the road, speedy and fast, and a van pulls over to ask if I need a lift. I explain that I do not, and that I am walking. The man asks if I need any food or anything and if I am okay. I smile and explain the project and he laughs, gives me a thumbs-up, says the obligatory *Bon Route!* and drives off with a wave. I think to myself how nice the Swiss are!

As I arrive into Lausanne, I think about how exciting it will be to wear clean clothes tomorrow, on my day off. Maybe I will go to a restaurant, wander around the city, look at people and modern things! On arriving into the city, however, I catch a glimpse of myself in the endless reflective glass of the modern shops. I am muddy-shoed, dirty-clothed, stinky, and unkempt. I look like a vagrant. It suddenly dawns on me that the man that stopped his van this morning was not just a generous man, but probably worked for some homeless charity. Around me, men and women in beautifully-pressed clothes and clean shoes walk, purposefully avoiding my gaze or my attempts at engaging them in conversation. I can see why: I might have asked them for some spare change! Part of me thinks that I should ignore them. I know in my heart that their avoidance of me because of what I look like is their problem, not mine. Another part of me wants to scream out: *I am a professional artist! I am not homeless! I eat at restaurants!*

Instead, I pay two Swiss Francs to use the public toilets, wash my face and fix myself up a bit. I stare at the man in the mirror: the tanned lined face; the thinning hair; the freckles that are screaming with sunshine. My shirt is ripped, and stained. My backpack looks well-used and worn. The Broken Stick: well, the stick is a stick. I realise I don't actually care. I have walked almost 2000 km. On my own. I have left all the things I hold dear, struggled and will struggle some more. I don't actually care what people think.

I leave the public toilet looking just as bad as when I went in, check into the hotel, shower, and lie on the big bed, enjoying the comfort. Later, I will walk the streets of the city and find somewhere to have a glass of wine.

Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell – *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*



## Day 63: Lausanne to Vevey

20 km | 5 hours | 1991 km in total | Hotel De La Gare

Follow the water's edge south east, rising into the vineyards at Rivax and Saint-Saphorin, braiding the motorway as you cross, and re-cross to find small paths between the grapes. Descend at Vevey.

Today, Stuart walked with me, filming my morning rituals and ablutions, capturing me as I set off. *Do you take time to enjoy the scenery?* he asks, and I tell him that mostly, I just look down while I walk, watching my feet and the road right in front of me. He chides me and tells me to pay more attention to the world around me, to find joy in all scenery and the amazing things in view. And he's right. So, walking along the side of Lac Lemman, I make sure to look up, and enjoy the view.

I turned eighteen on the side of a mountain near Interlaken, and I have always had a soft spot in my heart for this funny country, Switzerland. I remember a friend's Aunt and Uncle driving me and my friend up into the hills of Geneva and us quietly resting between the vineyards: the older adults sipping wine and we teenagers sipping Cokes and staring at the lake view as clouds licked the tops and sides of the mountains. The only sound was the gentle, gentle wind and the occasional bird-call or distant train.

Today, nearly twenty-two years later, I repeat this scene, though, without friends or any sipping of wine or Cokes, just the glugging of water out of my bottle. But the lake is the same and there are similar vineyards, and that same silence. It is utterly enjoyable. Later, walking more slowly, and looking around, I wander through small villages and try to remember who I was so long ago. I cannot quite elide who I am now



with that boy from all those years ago: are we really the same person?

It is said that you shed every cell in your body, constantly. And after seven years, there is no part of you that existed before. You are completely biologically replaced. A wholly different person. I am not sure of the scientific veracity of this fact, but I like the metaphor of it. It suggests that I have shed myself three times since I was that eighteen-year-old boy on the side of a mountain. I have been three different people already. There is a joy in that thought, and I am not sad at all.

As I walk, in the distance, through the valley, I can see my path over the Alps. I think of Clyde running down the hill, fourteen and full of youth and confidence and potential. That image is as powerful to me now as it was on that first day. In thinking about my ageing, and the passage of time, it seems fitting that this walk started with the scene of a boy, joyfully and wildly, running downhill, and soon will become about a man, strongly and confidently, walking uphill.

Kate Bush – *Running Up That Hill*

## Day 64: Vevey to Aigle

25 km | 5 hours | 2016 km in total | Vevey Hotel and Guesthouse

Follow the water, again, until Villeneuve, cross railway to west side. Follow broadly parallel to railway lines through Roche, until you meet a small stream running down from Yvorne. Trace this west until finding crossing at motorway, then head east into Aigle.

I saw this fork today. I think it was probably public art.

Contemporary public sculpture and I have a very difficult relationship. On one hand, we share the desire to leave the gallery and communicate directly with people, seeking out new relationships with publics. And on the other hand, a lot of it is just shite.

I care a great deal about this subject and most of my work explores the notion of 'publicness' in an ephemeral sense, and indeed, a collaborative approach to people in the world is an essential part of my work, and this project. One could argue, however, that the public art side of this walk (the exchanges and conversations with the people I meet and talk to along the way about art) is tenuous because there is no cohesive notion of 'public'. They are all different, from different places, have never met each other, and the only thing that joins them is their shared experience with this project.



But this is always the case for any work that claims to be for the public: who exactly is this amorphous public? Who does this consist of? And who decides the limits of that group? This is an important question, because – as with all art – one has to know to whom it is directed. So when we say it is ‘public’: who exactly is that group of people? The definition of that is never simple. A public is a heterogeneous amalgam of many different desires, and each member of the population will each have different intentions and different passions. We can never be all together.

The problem I have with the fork in the lake is that it assumes there is a cohesive public to whom the fork is speaking. And that public knows why it is there, and what purposes it serves. And those that commissioned it know its public, which includes visitors like me, as a popular tourist site.

I find it lacking, and I do not know the answers, and at 7am in the morning, in the cold rain, I just can’t care. Sometimes art asks more than I have the energy to give, and so I just get angry and walk on, towards the mountains. I have to save my energy for them.

The National – *Walk Off*

## Day 65: Aigle to St Maurice

24 km | 4 hours | 2040 km in total | Hôtel-Restaurant des Messageries

West out of Aigle, directly to Motorway 9, and run parallel south east, crossing to west side at earliest chance. Continue following, until able to turn west to Collombey. Cross river before Collombey going in opposite direction to water, on south west side. Go through Massongex. Join Chemin de Chatillon.



The crisp blue sky frames the grey mountains this morning. The sun is pleasant on my shoulders and there is an alpine breeze that gently touches my face. As I arrive into St Maurice, I have a message waiting for me from another artist – Rocca Gutteridge – who has asked me to speak about the growing ‘Migrant Crisis’ in Europe and how this project connects to that unravelling horror. She writes: *The Deveron Arts website says about your project: ‘The route will exercise the right for freedom of movement to the extreme.’ I really don’t think this is true, based on the myriads of gendered, racial and financial privileges this project holds. There is so much opportunity to have a real conversation here... It’s great to be able to message you about the problematics of you walking across Europe, at this moment. But can there be more opportunity for others,*

*who aren’t your social media friends, to address the comparison of an artist – a white male artist with multiple passports – being paid to walk to the Venice Biennale, to the current crisis of movement restriction across Europe and the endless restrictions of movement against bodies in general?*

Her tone is urgent, critical and goading, and she is correct to challenge the project: I am, indeed a white, male artist being paid to do this project. I am literally and metaphorically walking in the opposite direction of those migrants. I have endless amounts of privilege. I know that. I write an email to her explaining my feeling that to claim this tragedy as an opportunity to make art would be patronising to the extreme. That is not to say I won’t vote on the matter or be involved politically in the situation’s change, or donate time/money to the cause. Because I do, and I will. But I think the best thing for anyone in a position of privilege to do would be to shut up and, as Rocca suggests, make space for those people whose voices have been silenced: make space for those with the real knowledge and insight of the situation. I can’t do that from here, from now, on the path. I write to her these thoughts and wonder if Rocca thinks that I am washing my hands off the problem. Possibly, I am. But, I think our entire Western lifestyle is predicated on the oppression of others: if I’ve ever bought cheap clothes, taken a car that uses petrol, or eaten cheap food... all of that is based on other people working horrifically for our benefit, and our system perpetuates that oppression and causes instability in other countries. It would therefore be hypocritical for me to politically rail against the systems of oppression when my lifestyle is the very cause of it. For me, we need to address that before we start putting bandages on the bodies of dead children.

Ides of March – *High On A Hillside*

## Day 66: St Maurice to Martigny

20 km | 4 hours | 2060 km in total | Hôtellerie Franciscaine

Ensure you’re on west side of river, motorway and railways and skirt the edge of valley, staying close to the valley floor. Go through Cases, Epinassey, Evionnaz, Balmaz and Vernayaz and into Martigny.

St Maurice is a small town built into the corners of the rough mountains, with a 1500-year-old abbey hidden like a camouflaged spider against the cliffs. I stay in a converted Franciscan Order. Crucifixes and bibles and the general detritus of religion are strewn about, more like decor than presentations of belief. The tall, quiet and religious receptionist asks me if I am heading to Rome on a pilgrimage. I explain that it is a pilgrimage of sorts, but that I am going to the Venice Biennale, and not to Rome. He smiles, explaining that his cousin – Christian Marclay – had won the first prize there in 2011.

As I settle into the sparse room, I find it interesting that the strands of Venice, religion and art should again become entwined, as if it were a sign to consider why I am doing what I am doing. All the small towns that I pass through, once relied on a constant stream of strangers on their way to Rome, with the Vatican glowing like a beacon, drawing them in like moths. I am no longer drawn to Venice, but rather

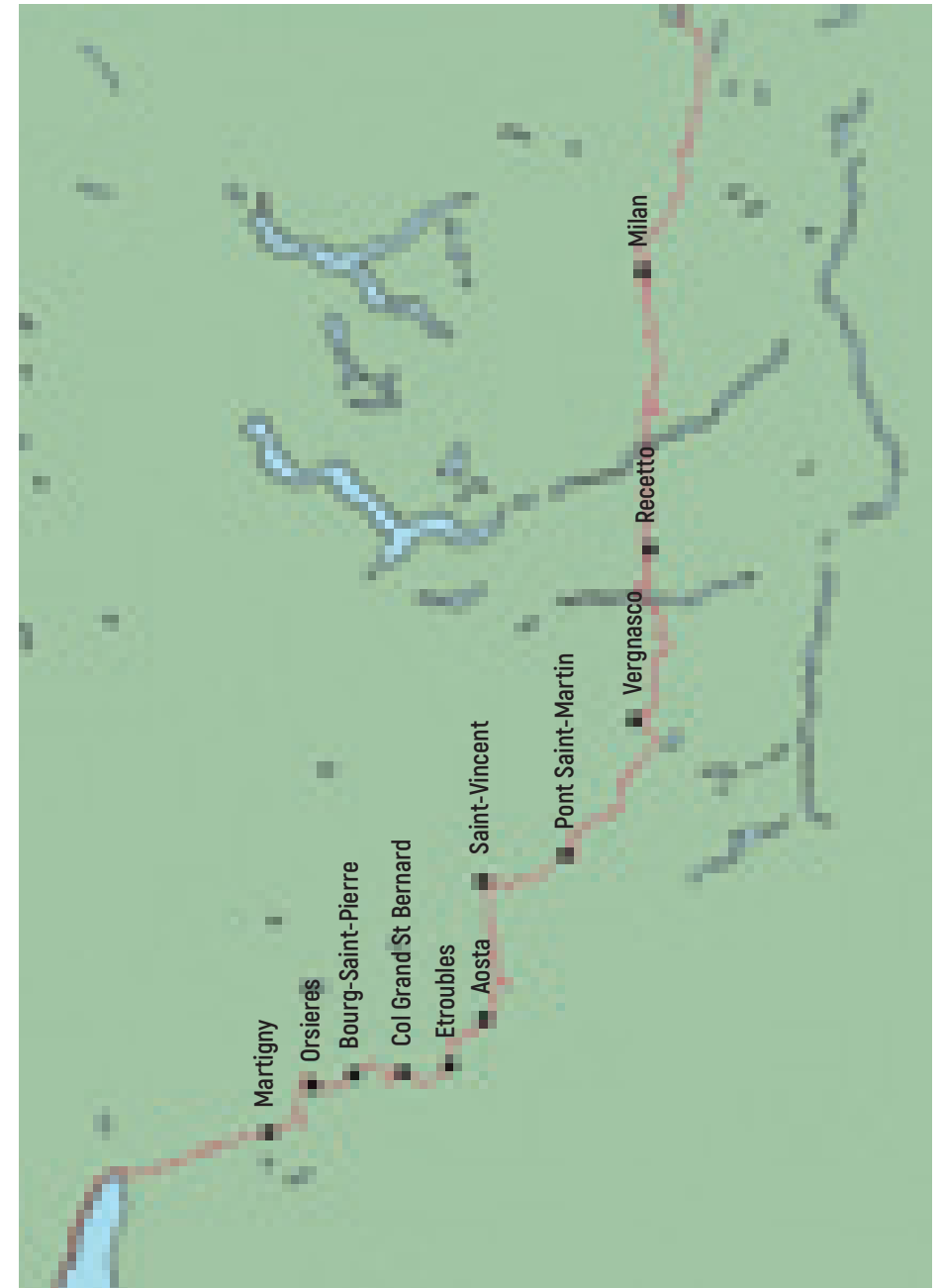
guided by the desire to finish. In that sense, the endpoint is no longer the Venice Biennale, but the completion of the project. I wonder if 'real' pilgrims felt the same? Did they lose faith along the way? Did they begin to waiver and stray? Would they find themselves faltering in their desire to reach their endpoint? Have I lost faith? To admit that I am losing my religion would entail me admitting I have faith in art – in the Venice Biennale and that kind of art world – in the first place. And I am afraid, I have to say, that I don't.

In admitting that, does this then become a disingenuous project? A fake pilgrimage? Perhaps. But, I think this is why I jettisoned the ideas of 'faith' and 'pilgrimage' so early on – the walk is teleological in the sense that it is a walk about itself, and in being about itself, it is a walk. It has become something more pagan and mythic than religious: it has become the snake that eats its own tail – the Ouroboros – and in that, Venice becomes superfluous. Rather than something that is rejected, something a disillusioned pilgrim rejected, Venice has merely become a point in time and space. And rather than the 'reason' of the walk and final, holy, golden blessing I'm supposedly seeking, it is just a location by the sea. Beautiful, yes, but there are other beautiful things. The faith I follow on this project is one of the body, and of social interaction. In order to be true to that, I will need to consider how it becomes 'art' in ways that are true to *that* religion, rather than any externally decided, organised and structured dictation.

Lee Marvin – *I Was Born Under A Wandering Star*



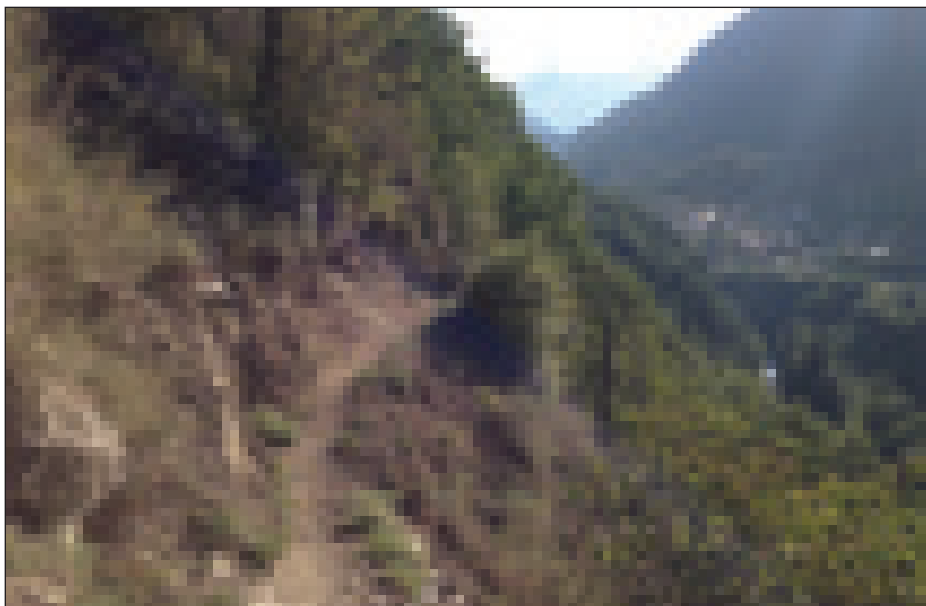
## Section 10: Martigny to Milan



## Day 67: Martigny to Orsieres

21 km | 6 hours | 2081 km in total | José María Rincón

Follow the path that traces the south east of Martigny, around the mountain, towards Valettes. This is a thin, dirt path, which is well marked, but weaves up and down, and clings to the side of the hill, so be careful if it is wet. Keep following path as it passes into Bovernier. Now on south side of river, follow path to Sembrancher, then directly south into Chamouille, and Douay, into Orsieres.



I have been honoured in having several amazing mentors in my life. Most of them have been female – which might explain my vehement feminism. Sam Ainsley has been integral to much of my development as an artist and, after yesterday's considerations, she writes to me: *Oh dearest Anthony, you do beat yourself up so much about this project: Is it art? Is it a pilgrimage? Is it a walk? Is it...? On and on! It's all very well to interrogate your motivations, thoughts and feelings, but do remember to just love the experience (I suspect a life changing one) and revel in the extraordinary experiences you are having and the people you meet.*

So, in honour of Sam, I make sure I am loving the experience all day. Here are a few descriptions:

This morning, the climb out of Martigny is suddenly steep, but the tunnel of trees that guide my silent steps dampen the sound of the trains and highway traffic across the river. Instead, I drift in and out of the cool shade of an early morning in the Alps.

In the woods, I come across a school group, each carrying notepads, poking in small ponds with sticks, excitedly comparing notes about something they found. The

teacher is quietly leaning against a rock, watching each child with a calm, sure and protective eye, allowing them to discover the world on their own terms. A white-haired girl is by herself, at the base of a tree. She looks up, excited and calls everyone over, and they all suddenly swarm her, excited and chattering.

After climbing for 200 m, the path gets steep-sided, and I find I am balanced between the cliff on the left and a deep ravine on the right. I walk without looking down and it amazes me that my feet seem to know how to land, how to push forward, and how to balance between cliffs and ravines. The path has chains bolted onto the sides of the cliff wall to remind you to hold on. One slip of a step would mean a long, long way down. I laugh out loud the whole way across.

Later, much higher up the mountain, a helicopter hovers at my eye-level for twenty minutes. I think that some dramatic mountain rescue must be taking place, but it turns out to be some construction work in the valley below. I can feel the wind of the spinning blades ruffle the branches, the leaves, my shirt and my short, short hair.

*Tindersticks – Falling Down A Mountain*

## Day 68: Orsieres to Bourg-Saint-Pierre

11 km | 4 hours | 2092 km in total | Hotel de l'Union

The Via Francigena route is well marked but heading south east out of Orsieres, use the roads as the walking paths have extreme ascents/descents and by this time, you don't care for that, choosing instead more direct routes. Head for Liddes, then it is a short distance to Bourg-Saint-Pierre.

The day starts with a field of Thyme, suddenly pungent and beautiful as the sun creeps over a hill and bursts it alight with colour. The smell is incredible and stays with me for hours.

It is almost entirely uphill today, on paths that oscillate between scrambling scratch marks on sides of ravines, to soft strips of beauty through dappled shade. The sun – always in my eyes, because I am always heading south – catches all the cobwebs: tiny, slanting stripes of silver. I walk into so many that my eyes become criss-crossed with lines, almost covered in an almost invisible sheet of almost gossamer. (I have had to overcome much of my arachnophobia on this walk: this is an unexpected bonus!)

There is 800 m of ascent today. I find a small roadside café to rest and recuperate. As I am sitting, resting, I meet a man called Patrick. He sits with me and asks me what I am doing. I explain the project and he asks me what my goal is. I tell him that, at the start, it was the Venice Biennale, but I am not so sure anymore. He asks why, and I say that in the process of living through the walk, it has become about so many different things: the social, the cultural changes, the process of the experience, living through the body, amongst other things. And now, it is not just about the one site, one place and one idea, although The Venice Biennale is still important on some level. I am not sure about my goals, because it is still happening: I still have just over twenty days of walking left. He nods, sagely.

We talk for about thirty minutes and he says that he is on his way to Aosta, pointing to his wee motor scooter. I ask him how long it will take him to get there. *Oh, I don't*



know, he says. *A truck driver could tell you the exact time it would take, but I plan to stop to take a few pictures or have a coffee. It's better to live in the moment.* He suggests in his life, he does not want to be 'up', he wants to be 'outside'. In other words, he explains that some people want to find ways to be bigger and better, but he just wants to start from the fact that you exist and the rest can come afterwards: *Too often, people confuse 'to be' and 'to have'. They think to have – to possess – is more important.*

When he gets up to leave, he buys me my coffee, wishes me well, and tootles off on his scooter, into the crisp sunlight of the Alps. I'm not sure if I have explained the exchange appropriately, but it feels so very, very important, and I need to write and tell you about it.

Shirley Bassey – *Climb Every Mountain*

## Day 69: Bourg-Saint-Pierre to Col Grand St Bernard

12 km | 4.5 hours | 2104 km in total | Hotel Restaurant du Crêt

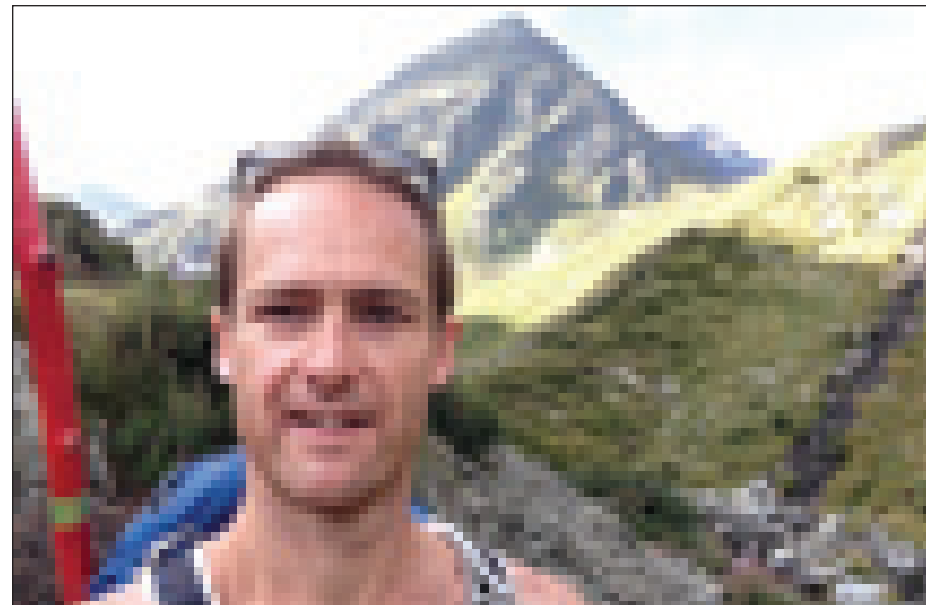
Follow Via Francigena path, upwards out of Bourg-Saint-Pierre, past Lac des Toules on west side. Parallel to road all the way to Col Grand St Bernard.

Today, I reached the top of the Alps.

Well, the top of the Alps on my walk.

I don't want to pretend I am ice-climbing, barehanded over glaciers.

Because I will not do that. I just put one-foot-in-front-of-another, and have done so for almost 2100 km so far. I am now 2473 m above sea level. That's almost 2.5 km above sea level. If I walked straight through the rock, it would take me 30 m to reach the water.



The clouds are wild, rolling in and off the top of the jagged peaks, suddenly occluding and revealing the silent grey rocks. They stab up like the eroded granite knives of dead gods. There's an alpine chill and it's so incredibly silent.

There is only one place to stay: An Italian Hotel, full of faded 1960's glory. I check-in, quickly shower, put on all the extra clothes I have and walk to the highest point I can find. I turn north and wave: wave back at Switzerland; to France; to England; to Scotland; to all the kind people that have helped me; to the strangers who have talked to me on the way; to the walkers who have walked with me; to those supporters who send good thoughts or encouragement; to Base Camp in Huntly, who keep me alive and sane and without whom none of this would happen; and to my amazing and supportive husband who I miss in every step and who I know would love being up here, love the spectacular view, love the adventure of it all. I lean over the cliffs into Italy, and enjoy the silence, until it becomes threatening and it begins to darken. I look up and the clouds and rocks seem so unforgiving, but I feel an affinity with their solitude.

Back in Switzerland, next to the hotel, there is a museum of St Bernard dogs and a monastery with a gift shop. Tourists step out of cars and busses, push their sunglasses back on their heads, stretch from sitting too much, and I want to tell them that I walked all the way here! I walked! But it is too emotional a day to figure out what exactly it is that makes sense, so I sit in the silence, with the clouds tumbling and obscuring the sharp-cliff and aches of the folded earth.

Today, all I can do is let the mountains do the talking.

The Beach Boys – *Walk On By*



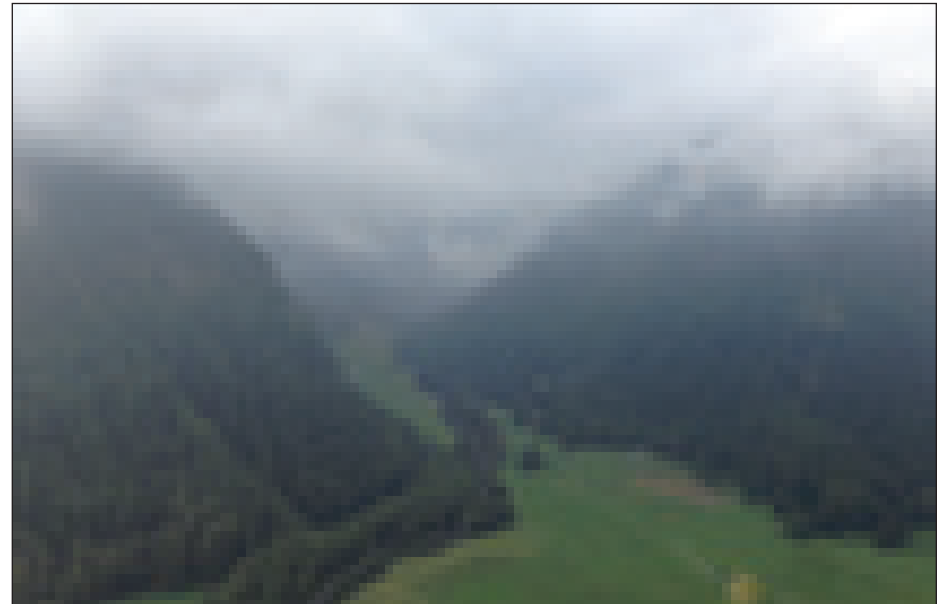


## Day 70: Col Grand St Bernard to Etroubles

10 km | 2.5 hours | 2114 km in total | Hotel Italia

South from Lago Del Gran San Bernardo, a small path over the scree, leads south east passing near the SS-27 motorway, several times. Well marked, but a loose, rocky and narrow path leads down the mountain passing north of Frazione Sanit Rhemy and Saint-Oyen and into Etroubles.

I set off quite early this morning, entering Italy and the land of Saint Anthony: a day-off on the top of the Alps seemed like a good idea at the time when we planned it all those months ago, but the joy of being stuck in a place with only two buildings for a full day wore off pretty quickly. There was so much silence. And there was the icy cold alpine weather, with touches of snow, and worsening, so I set off at first light, avoiding any further wintering conditions.



A combination of wetness, slowly eroding grips on the soles of shoes, and a very, very loose terrain mean that, in many instances, I am literally sliding downhill: rolling down the side of the Alps. Sometimes it is fun. Other times it is chilling, with the stab of horror as my feet untether themselves from the good land and the ground untethers itself from me, and cliffs come suddenly too close for comfort. So, I sing. I sing loudly. To the hills and trees and beasts and birds. I sing a song my friend sent me the day before I left. The chorus of the song is: *I'm going to walk up the side of a mountain, I'm going to walk down the other side of a mountain, I'm going to swim in a river, lie in the sun, I'm going to try to be nice to everyone.* I sing to distract myself of the fear and to



distract myself from the distances down, but mostly I sing to the fog that hangs so, so, so low that, sometimes, I cannot see the next curve in the switchback/hairpin curves.

The fog does not sing back, but sometimes, the song echoes off the sides of the valley or cliffs that I can't see. So, I am not singing alone.

I descend 1200 m today. From 2400 to 1200 – I am halfway down to sea level. If we think about the journey to Venice vertically, I have travelled half the remaining distance in one day today. The time I have left – the eighteen remaining days of walking (with one break day in Milan) – then parcels out the rest of those vertical metres. Eighteen days to go back to all those questions I have been asking: those mysteries, those different strands, and begin to weave them into some sort of sense... if possible!

In the song I have been singing all day today, I like how it just references mountain. Not 'the' mountain. In that respect, it can mean any mountain; it could mean any difficulty, and any challenge. We walk up it, and then we walk down it. Like so much of life: we go through it and we move on, and as long as we take time to enjoy the sun and the river, and we are nice to everyone, the song continues. We continue walking. Sounds like a good way to live life.

Miles Davis – *Walkin'*

## Day 71: Etroubles to Aosta

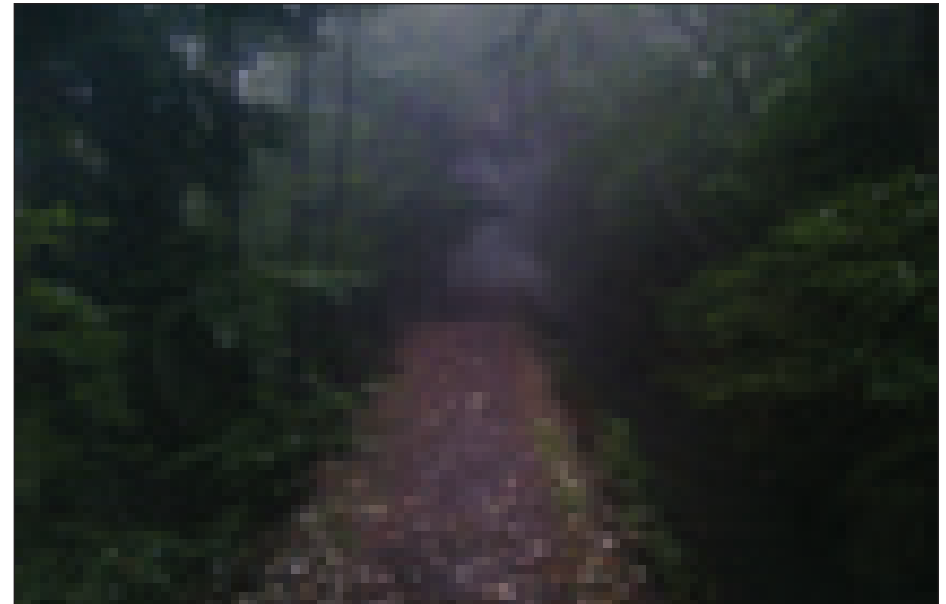
20 km | 6 hours | 2134 km in total | Hotel Col Serena

Starting south side of the motorway, follow mountain paths parallel to motorway, through Echevennoz and south west of Condemine. Don't lose height, but follow contours to Champlorensal, and start to descend to Chez Percher, then south to Fiou, and Excenex, Entrebin, Arpuilles. Hairpin down into Aosta.

The rain is constant and endless: I linger in cloud almost all day, wetness seeps into my jacket and rain-trousers. It is an invasive fog. I live in a grey, cold world all day, although, I admit, it has its own beauty. I see no one. For most of the morning, I follow a fast flowing stream. It flows perfectly along the edge of the path, between me and the rough dark mountain above, keeping a constant but steady decline by following the contours. Sometimes, the water flows so fast, it seems to climb uphill, avoiding gravity with the sheer weight behind it. (Later, I discover the channel was built in the 1400's to irrigate farmer's crops. The mountain municipality had 600 years to perfect its flow, clinging evenly to the slope, branching off to different fields and towns when it was needed.) I discover a grotto, dripping saintly water, blessing a now mouldy marble Mary. The greenness of the moss is neon. I see tree trunks thick with lichens, dressed as if in frilly crinolines.

At one point, the cloud is so thick and the rain so heavy and the trees so dense, that it seems to be night. A deer darts up the path ahead of me, suddenly veering right into the woodlands and is gone. Red, red-almost-purple, red apples, dripping off the orchard trees, their colour exploding against the grey sky. Orange flowers.

I cannot take pictures of any of these things. It is too wet to risk the equipment. This makes me think about art and how it exists in the experience of the viewing/participating/happening, rather than in the object (like a photograph). Art lies in the



memory, rather than the thing. This made me reflect on this walk: you – yes, you, the reader – are already part of the proof of this artwork, because you know it, because you read about it. You call the artwork into presence by reading, by knowing I've walked this far and have some few miles to go. Some of you have helped directly: hosting me, walking with me, dusting me down, feeding me and sending me on my way. Some have played more passive roles. Some are just becoming part of it right now. But, in whatever way you took part, the memory is created and the work is made manifest. We did it together. In other words, the photos I take, these writings, the maps, the postcards, everything, they are secondary to the imaginary of its occurrence. And *you* are part of that storytelling. Like the wonderful Sam Ainsley suggested to me several weeks ago: *Perhaps this project is about stories*. And I like this. So the question now becomes about how I tell this story. Or, to be more specific, how *you* continue to tell this story.

Emeli Sandé – *Mountains*

## Day 72: Aosta to Saint-Vincent

28 km | 6 hours | 2162 km in total | Hotel Mochettaz

South of Aosta Autoporto, cross south side of Fiume Dora Baltea, and follow east, through various suburbs, industrial zones, and nature conserves. Veer into Fenis to cut off a northward bend of the river then straight to Septumain. Cross river just before and north of Pontey. Follow roads into Chatillon, and then due east through Panorama and into Saint-Vincent.

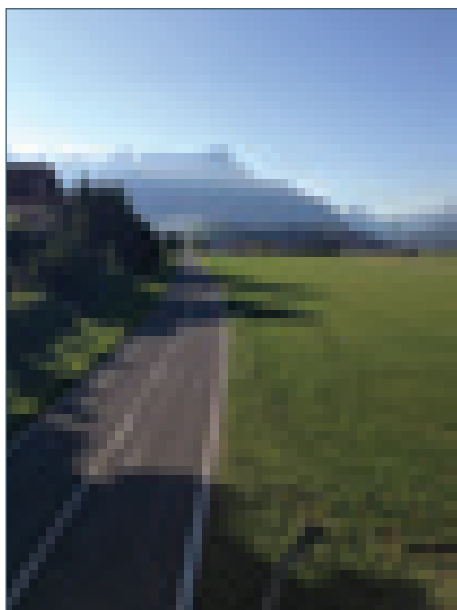
I arrive into Saint-Vincent within six hours today, exhausted but in fine fettle. My brother arrives tonight and this is no doubt influencing my good spirits. We have the

remainder of the Aosta Valley to cover together, and I look forward to spending the time with him. It has to be said, however: we argue. Endlessly. It is a well-known family trait, commented upon by all in-laws and friends. We argue. About everything. So, walking for four days with my favourite sparring partner should be fun. And while my brother and I undoubtedly love each other deeply and honestly respect each other, our different paths in life pre-dispose us to disagreement: he is a hard scientist and I am a flighty artist. The rational and the irrational. I am, often, the obvious loser in debates, simply because of my predisposed irrationality. His flawless logic always unravels my crazy ideas: proof is presented and arguments are finished, followed by a nice cup of tea. It is the way of our life.

Tangentially, on my walk today, I listen to a podcast on evolution and the speakers discuss the *unique uniqueness* of humans. They suggest that while all animals are unique – the ring-tailed lemur adapted uniquely to its environment, for example – humans are the only truly uniquely unique species because we have culture. The speakers disregard notions of intelligence on the grounds that many other animals have intelligences: while chimps can use stone tools and we can do microsurgery, for example, the only difference between those acts is in degrees of competency. The rub of the matter is the *meaning* of that intelligence, and that comes from notions of culture: things handed down through generations. Humans can take past intelligences – past ideas – and build upon them: adapt and change them to suit different purposes. We not only pass things on to future generations, but those future generations can change them as they see fit. This, the speakers suggest, is about thinking differently, and about having crazy ideas, adapting, changing, and developing novel, unexpected things. In other words, the uniquely unique skill of humans is to be irrational. This irrational, unexpected, crazy-out-there-thinking is

why we have progressed beyond the apes and into the creatures we are now. Some could argue this is bad, because it has also wrought much destruction and misery to us and to the other animals with whom we share this planet. But, I am viewing it as a positive and take pride in my irrationality! It is, after all, my only one true skill – and my only one true weapon – against my brother. I plan to use it well in the coming days!

Terry Riley – *Happy Ending*



## Day 73: Saint-Vincent to Pont Saint-Martin

27 km | 6 hours | 2189 km in total | Hotel Alla Posta

Following river Dora Baltea, zig-zag to avoid walking on the motorway, south of Cillian, Perral, Ciseran, and into Montjovet. Cross the river to Oley, and follow west side of river through, Vierung, Fabbica, crossing back to east side of river at Dialley, into Verres, and then into Arnaud. Cross back to west side at Hone. Almost immediately, cross again, into Bard, east to Donnas and directly east into Pont-Saint-Martin.



I think I broke my brother.

Granted, much of that breaking could be down to sheer exhaustion, because the poor chap's plane from Canada was late, causing him to miss his transport connections, and so he spent much of the night in train stations and on buses. He got into a hotel in Turin at 1am and got up at 4am to reach me before I left for the day. He arrived at the hotel just in time for breakfast. And, immediately after that, we stormed out, following the Dora Baltea River, and down into the Aosta Valley.

After a morning of walking, I notice he makes the noises that I used to make when I started: groaning when standing; exhaling sharply when sitting down; silent, teeth-gritting at the agony of cramp. I also note that I am rather quiet, and light. It highlights the distance I have come from the person who I was when I started this walk, to the person I am now.

I do not mention this in suggestion that I have somehow evolved: only that I have most certainly changed, and my brother's responses remind me of that. I've somehow become robotic and automatic in my body. It walks and then walks some more. Tank. I rarely think or react to the aches and pains. I be Tank and roll onwards.

We talk rapidly, catching-up on news of family and life and then he asks how I am holding up, and I tell him about being a robotic tank that just rolls forward. He pauses and tells me about a recent study he has read, about a certain type of jellyfish that only has a brain as long as it is moving. The neurones needed to enact movement evolved in the first stage of its life, and as it moves onto the second, its neurones waste away and it loses its brain, becoming more of a tree, more of a plant, when it blossoms and reproduces. It only needs a brain to move, not to complete its life cycle.

I wonder if I've become the opposite. During the walk, I am automatic: I don't need to think, and it's only when I stop walking that I grow a brain again and am able to think, reflect, react.

Probably not, but I like that idea. I like the idea that I am the opposite of a jellyfish. They move without purpose, letting the waves and currents guide them, and I, most definitely, have a destination.

*The Fall – Mountain Energei*

## Day 74: Point-Saint-Martin to Vergnasco

39 km | 10.5 hours | 2228 km in total | Ponte Romano Hotel

This day, you leave the Via Francigena, and prepare – mentally – for a lack of direction. Following parallel to the river, again, head south through Carema, Torredaniele, Settimo Vittone, Monestrutto, Ivozio, San Germano, and Borgofranco d'Ivrea. Here, head east, up the Via Guglielmo Marconi (SP-73) until it becomes Autostrada SP-74. Follow this until Casali Serra, finding Via Andarte, and continue on this as the road runs to a small path. Here, head into the hills, climbing parallel to a small river. The path is difficult, unmarked and poor. Keep climbing until possible to cross the river, head east, towards Torrazzo, Magnano, Zimone, meeting with the motorway SP-400. Follow to Cerrione, and eventually Vergnasco.

Today, after a long, long, soggy walk, we arrive into a home that is as beautiful as it is comfortable. Emma, our host, meets us at the door and sees in our hungry and tired eyes just the sort of welcome we need. She arranges a pizza to be delivered, gets us tea, and lets us settle into our rooms. Yesterday, I spoke about how my brother's aches and pains reminded me of what I used to be: how I used to move through the land. Today, I am reminded of something else I'd forgotten over the past month: utter exhaustion. The Alpine trails have been difficult, truly, but the days were adapted so that they were shorter, more manageable. In the swathe of re-planning, we must have overlooked the distances of today and tomorrow, because they sit around 40 km. Today was 39 km and involved, it involved many hills, including one climb and scramble over a water-fall which tumbled away down the side of the mountain towards the valley.

While on this waterfall, I rant to my brother that it is a myth to think walking is about seeing new things and new worlds and new experiences. I tell him that it is only about pain and misery and suffering and stifling loneliness. I must be yelling because my brother says he is shocked at how angry I am: angry at brambles, angry at hills, angry at dogs barking behind fences, angry at long stretches of road and path. I hit a point where all the repeating frustrations that have dogged me for the past days become too



much. I am endlessly glad of his company: uplifting, protective and positive. I suppose knowing he is there and is the older, protective brother allows me this moment of weakness to be angry and have a few irrational tantrums. Aside from that, we actually have a thoroughly enjoyable day. I pick figs fresh from a tree, and walk through ancient vineyards and see amazing vistas back along the valley.

Back at Emma's house, I head to bed and check my emails: Base Camp in Huntly has sent me a note. They must have sensed my raging frustrations and sent a photograph with uplifting, cheering words and smiles. And, like energy moving along the thin red thread of love, I feel a zip, a buzz of loving electricity to get me through the next few days.

*Gonno – To The End, Slowly*

## Day 75: Vergnasco to Recetto

39 km | 8.5 hours | 2267 km in total | Come a Casa

South east along SS-143 to Bastia, east to Arro, zig-zag on dirt, farming roads to Lista, passing north over Fornace Crocicchio. South east through Formigliana, then north to meet canal. Follow canal east to Seslia River. Under A-4 motorway bridge over river, a small catwalk for repair works: use this to cross river. North of A-4 motorway, follow roads east to waterpark, then few hundred metres further to Cascina Cascinoni.

As we stumble towards the end today, the sun finally edges out from behind the oppressive fug of the day: the horizon arced – grey-like – hugging low to the flat, flat land. The air is so heavy that we find it hard to move through it. It rarely rains, but it seems like we are always wet. When we arrive, our host – Massimiliano – meets us. It must be said: the man is a saint, because he has prepared our dinner. I cannot



describe what it means to have dinner made after eight hours of walking. And he has prepared a hand-made lunch for our walk tomorrow. The world is truly a wonderful place with people like Massimiliano, and it is heartening to discover, especially from a day that was so difficult, physically and emotionally. I shall let my brother, Christiaan, explain. He writes:

*It was a different experience today because it wasn't beautiful and awe inspiring. It was a very functional and utilitarian environment: lots of straight lines carrying electricity, cars and water. It was definitely not designed for carrying walkers. But, it was, none-the-less, an environment of people. The most interesting experience was speaking to Mohammed, a man who had travelled from Gambia to Libya, then paid 650 Euros to cross the Mediterranean. An English-speaking, black, Muslim man who was finding it difficult to integrate into Italian culture. Living in a refugee camp, sleeping in a room with six other people – people not from his tribes: Malian, Senegalese, Nigerian – and separated from family, yet, still trying very hard to survive. A man lost in a land designed for efficient industry. He seemed to survive by begging in bus stops/truck stops, but has been chased away and warned by police many times. His journey contrasts our Western acts where you are walking to explore what art can say about pilgrimage or walking. And I will go home after two days, and he just wants to survive. And even after you are done reading this, Mohammed will still be trying to get into Germany or Switzerland and still be trying to send money back to his family. His odds aren't good. The saddest part of our day was seeing a woman at the side of the road, who may have been a refugee as well. Almost certainly she was a prostitute, with her sparkling high shoes and lipstick, and the way she beckoned to cars and tried to grab our attention. It seemed very odd in the middle of the day, in the middle of a bleak, rural road. But, the geopolitics have changed from Pont-Saint-Martin – a hiking and tourism spot for wealthy Europeans – to the front-line of the troubled African nations, which happens to be right here, in Italy.*

Bill Conti – *Going The Distance*

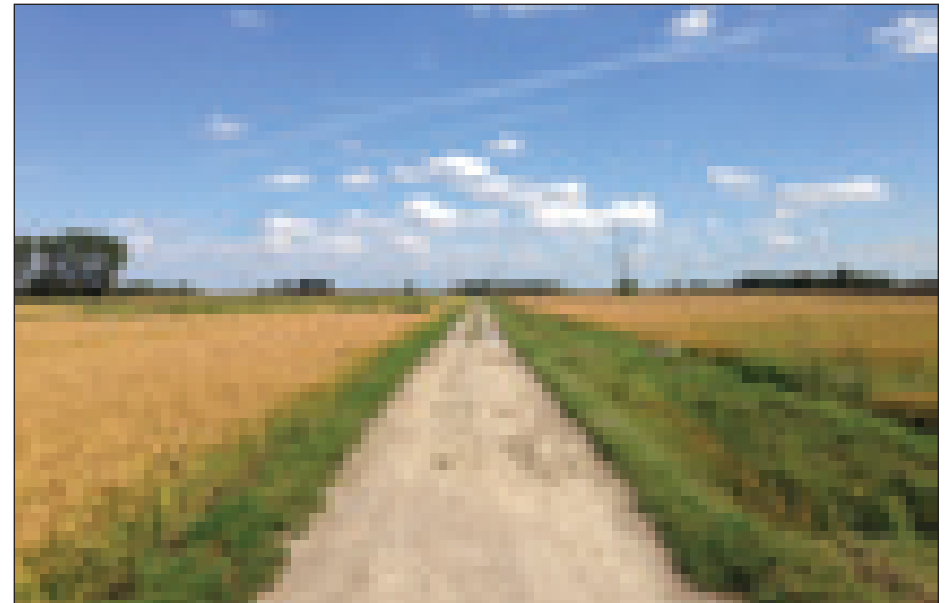
## Day 76: Recetto to Boffalora Sopra Ticino

40 km | 8.5 hours | 2307 km in total | Cascina Cascinoni with Massimiliano

South to Biandrate, and then find the canal. Follow this east, until the railway intersects it. Leave the canal and follow the railway for a short time, turning east to skirt the north of Novara, through industrial zones, passing through Pernate and Romentino, and further east until the bridge over the Ticino. Using the north side, sneak onto the emergency exit paths, and follow bridge (dangerous!) all the way, taking the emergency exit just east of the river bank. Following parallel to A-4, until you can head south to Boffalora Sopra Ticino.

This morning, brother's ankle is too swollen to walk, and so I leave him to make his own way to the next destination, catching a lift with Saint Massimiliano, last night's host. This means I have the day to myself. Finally, it is not raining, and I travel on flat, open plains. I plough along, going at a pace, I had not realised, is fast. It is warm, but not too hot and I think about how I have done this walking, so endlessly, for three months. Almost ninety days since I set off, with seventy-six days of walking already completed. I have only two weeks to go until I arrive. Thinking about this, I remember something that a friend wrote to me: *I heard a disturbing quote from Eastern philosophy recently and thought of you- 'On a journey of 100 miles, the 90th mile is only halfway'. Pah, what do those old zen guys of yesteryear know? Every last one of them is dead! Hope mind and body are holding up. Anyway, pretty sure Venice is just around that next corner...*

And so, after my forth almost 40 km day in a row, I try not to think about the end, because even though I have done '90 miles', it still feels like I'm only half way. Or, at



least, I don't want to think about how close I am to finishing, because two weeks of walking is still difficult and long. And in those two weeks, there are a lot of long, long days. So, I just keep going and I try not think about how far there is to go.

I meet my brother on the other side of a difficult, crazy motorway bridge. He has rented a bike and cycled to find me. He was worried that I would have done something stupid, like walk across the crazy motorway bridge. Which I had. And I can tell he is angry with me, because he has to cycle away to calm down. But he returns and we walk slowly to our host's house – the ever lovely Roberto and his stylish, classic home – and find a package. And inside the gold-wrapped, heather-clad present: whisky, shortbread and an issue of the Huntly Express. Treasures from the beginning of my walk, bursting me full of love. Even though I may still have 10 miles of my 100 miles to go, the package makes me feel like at least 5 of those miles are already gone. I feel so much closer to home. Thank you, Base Camp, for keeping me alive and sane and loved. And stocked in shortbread and whisky. I share them with my brother and his big ankle, and we enjoy his last night in Italy, before heading home. I toast his ankle and he drinks to my legs and tells me: *it's not far to go now*.

James Blake – *Not Long Now*

### Day 77: Boffalora Sopra Ticino to Milan

36 km | 8.5 hours | 2343 km in total | Villa Milan Lakes EXPO

Using farm roads, head east towards Magenta, then to the south of Corbetta, into Soriano, Cascina Cantalupa and San Giacomo. Slight south to Cislano, then east to Cusago, joining the Via Ferruccio Parri cycle routes to take you to the centre of Milan.



I leave my brother at the train station in Magenta, and head off on my lonesome again. It is curiously easy to adapt to being alone again, and it makes me worry about how easily I am going to adapt back to 'normal' life after such a long time on the road. On one hand, I am excited: no more living out of a back-pack; more than two t-shirts; my bed and my darling husband. On the other hand: no adventure; no different views; no new ideas to write about.

To adjust to my loneliness, I listen to a radio show about walking and writing, and the double-helix they seem to engender. There is a long history of walking writers: Dickens, Wordsworth, as well as many multitudes of contemporary scribblers who make a direct link between walking and writing.

I have found on this project that they are natural bedfellows: you almost need the total physical immersion of a walk in order to find the total mental immersion in writing. Rather than just becoming a tool in its own right, my writing on the walk has emerged (I think) as a way of finding a way to talk to you. (Yes, you.) On particularly solitary days, writing allows me to have conversations, even if no one is around.

Years ago, I lived with a beautiful friend – a writer – and she told me that she had a drawer in her head labelled: *Things to tell Anthony*. She said she would walk around and be in the world and see things and think that I would appreciate them. On some days – I am guessing on particularly interesting days – she said the drawer would become so full that it wouldn't open: it was so stuffed full of things to say. And so she collected things, notes and observations that she wanted to pass on to me, but couldn't, because the drawer was crammed full to bursting.

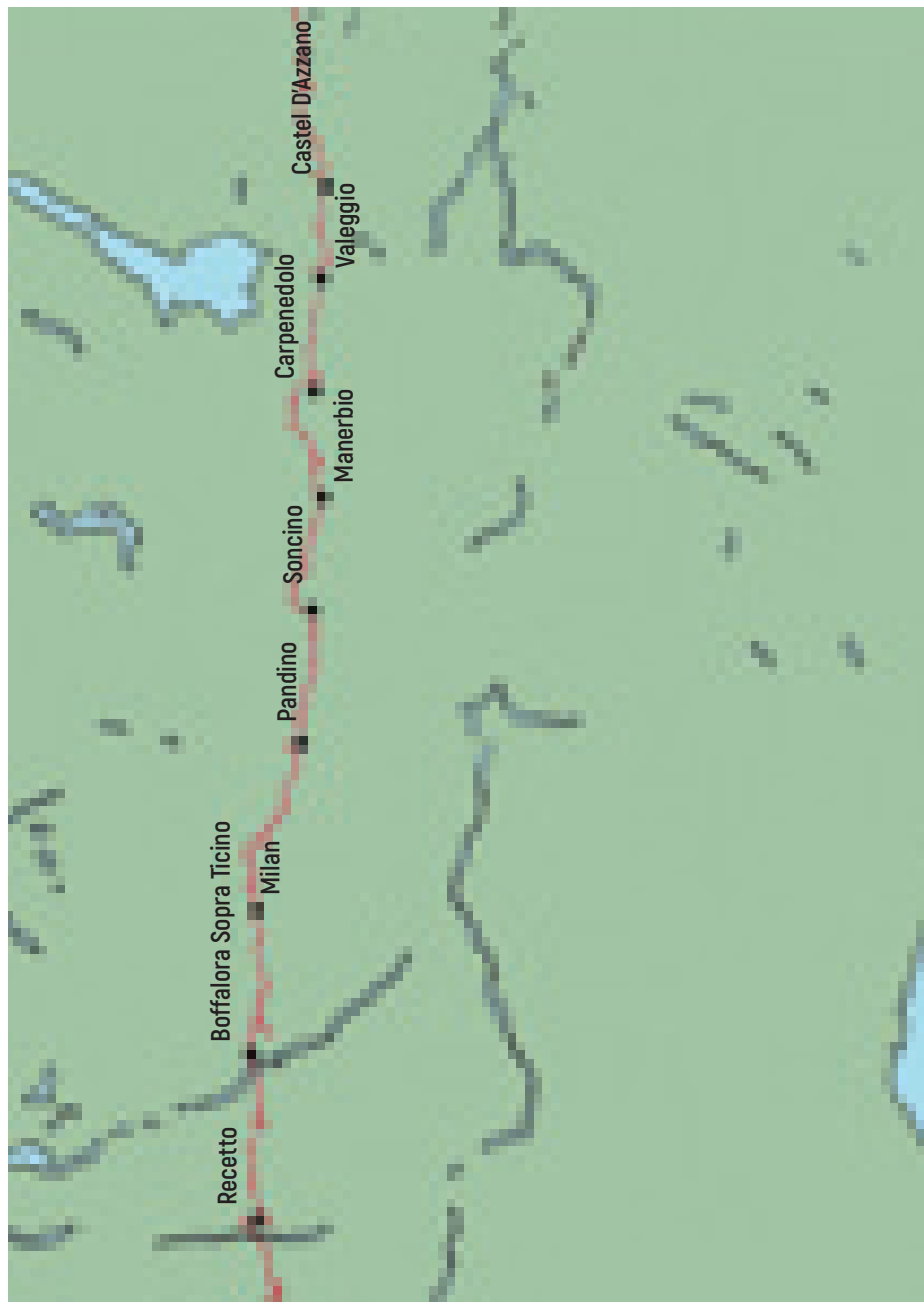
I feel much the same when I walk. I see things that I want to pass on to you, and the writing has become a way to ensure that the drawer doesn't get too full. That the project doesn't become too overwhelming. That the ideas have some repository and have a form to be shared: to enter into conversation, even if it is just talking into the void. They have been vital to my sanity. So, I walk, and I scribble away to ensure that drawer in my head does not become too crammed full.

Billy Wayne – *Walking and Strolling*





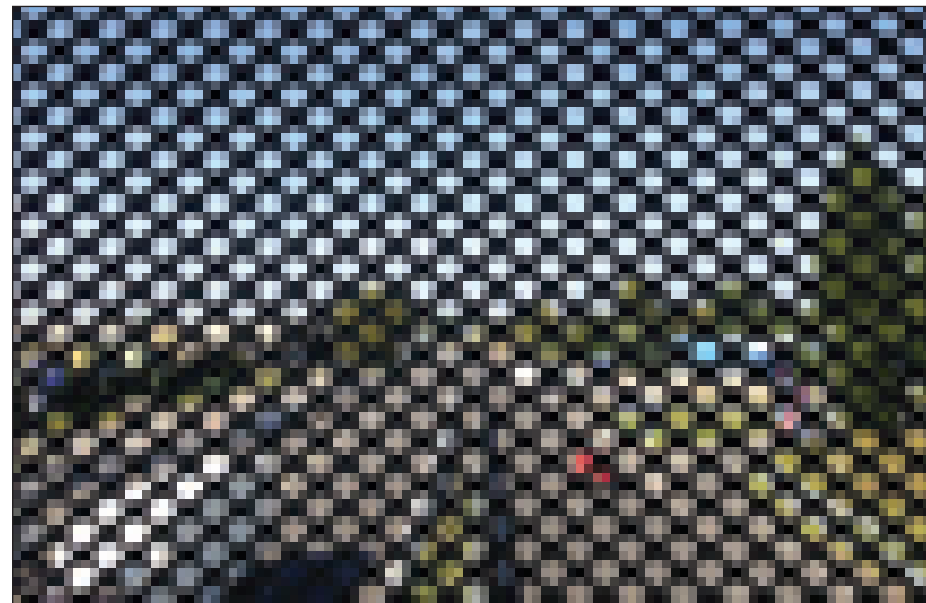
## Section 11: Milan to Castel D'Azzano



## Day 78: Milan to Pandino

34 km | 8 hours | 2377 km in total | Hotel Mayorca

Head east, south of railway, on the Via Rivoltana to Tregarezzo. South through industrial lands, wending around some artificial lakes, to Cassignanica. Continue south to Pantigliate, taking east route after town into Paulo, the Zelo Buon Persico, Bisnate, Rosa, Spino d'Adda, Nosadello and into Pandino.



I thought I'd share a story that I think encapsulates so many of the fleeting exchanges, the intersections, the crossing of lines and paths that webs this world together. I stayed in a place called the Performing Arts Forum (PAF) in Saint Erme, in France. It was Day 42, and I had already walked through the Cairngorms, through the Dales, through all of England and most of Scotland: I had been walking in France for ten days. I stayed in this strange and chaotic place, enjoying a communal dinner set out in long tables in a garden, candles hanging from trees, as the moon rose. I randomly sat next to a lady who had come from the UK to participate in an event happening at PAF. We chatted and I heard about her work and interests, and I had suggested she join me as I departed the following morning, to talk more, but it was quite early and she never managed to make it. I thought that would have been the last I had seen or heard from her, but...

A week ago, she emailed me, explaining that she had realised that I was connected to an old friend of hers: a friend who had once been very important, but they had now drifted apart, painfully. This painful separation had given her pause about changing directions in



life when she had gone to PAF and suddenly, a strange man who was wandering through the town next to her, was tangentially connected to that very same friend.

She has allowed me to use her words to explain and I am eternally grateful that she should 1) be such an excellent writer and 2) allow me to share it with you. I include it as an example of how this walk echoes out, splinters stories, threads and spools out lines of thought and connection. It's humbling.

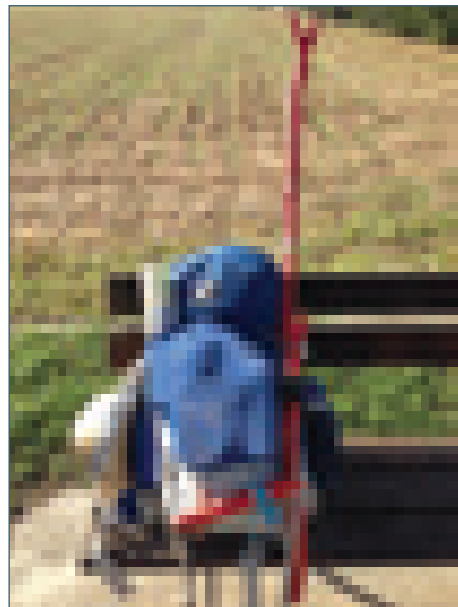
She writes: *These lines that you've drawn through your walking, and the connections that you've made – they aren't only the ones you can see and the ones you have experienced, but the invisible connections between all the thoughts, emotions, and people that are woven together by your walking. Somehow, the act of your walking has enough weight to allow relations to be engraved more deeply into the world by those who choose to afford them significance. In writing this, I've chosen to draw another pattern in chaos, and weave you in as part of my story, because in walking, you have given me a possibility for a significance that wouldn't otherwise exist. I will do my best with your gift, to make that significance a good one. Thank you, C.*

Edwin Star – 25 Miles

## Day 79: Pandino to Soncino

33 km | 7.5 hours | 2410 km in total | Cattleya Rooms

South of Pandino, join canal east all the way to Crema. At Crema, enter old town, cross River Serio, then north to meet canal again, heading east. Leave canal at Salvirola, heading north east to Albera, then Ticengo, Villacampagna and directly north to Soncino.



Sore and difficult today: it is hard moving through the dense, muggy air. I have found I often feel like this on days before it rains. Perhaps all the building moisture in the air makes it harder to move through. As if there were more friction. And so my body has to swim through the air. It is exhausting. And very unscientific.

Perhaps because of the impending end or perhaps due to the exhaustion of the day, I have a frustration tantrum about seven hours into the walk today: it consists of me screaming at the endless spider webs that I have been walking through. It is rather childish and I'm sure I look ridiculous to anyone who sees me yelling obscenities to invisible threads and small insects. It doesn't make me feel better either. I throw my backpack down to have a sulk, and almost snap The Broken Stick further, and almost crush The Oak.

At least he (The Oak) is alive and well. He spends his days peering from the right side of my backpack, where he is kept safe in a pocket. He has grown very little, but he has grown. He seems healthy and sturdy: ready to be an oak tree, ready to become huge. We have plans to give him a home in Venice, but I will be sad to leave him. He's been such a wise and sturdy companion, but it is his destiny. The Stick. Well, it's still with me. I have rarely used it at all on this entire walk, and it spends most of the journey attached to the left side of my backpack, having an easy ride and being a sort of red flag-pole, attracting strange glances, finger-pointing and whispers and suspicious nods. It is still The Damned Stick to me, because its purpose seems to do nothing but mark me out as something different: something *not from around here*. Which, of course, I am, but sometimes, it gets exhausting to be a stranger. I suppose, in that sense, it has become my cross to bear: being a stranger, and outsider.

They work well together, on either side of my pack: one endlessly positive and wise and fecund, and the other an annoying trickster that made everything difficult. In its journey, The Stick is a foot shorter after the incident on Day 41. I felt rather guilty about its breaking, so I kept the part that broke off and it hangs from the bottom of my pack.

I realise that the three create almost a Holy Trinity of Oak, Stick and Broken Stick Bit. These are the signs of my walking religion: Something growing, something stable and something broken. I feel like the imagery of Saint Anthony has faded over the past months, lost in the weight of walking, but these three things bring it back.

Armando Trovatioli – *Passeggiata Inutile*

## Day 80: Soncino to Manerbio

26 km | 5 hours | 2436 km in total | Molino Antico

Using mostly farming roads head east to Orzinouvi, south east Gavazza, Rosa, and Coniolo. East on to San-Paolo, Tre Ponti, Cadignano, and pass north of Breda Libera, and enter Manerbio from west.

Eight days to go, and I find myself getting more and more tired. Today, the sky is incredibly active: changing and morphing all the time, but never opening up to rain. It threatens, and that is more exhausting.

Soon, this project will be over and all the strands and separate threads will need neatening up. Peter, a host from Day 12, writes to me: *I wonder what happened to the 'items' that you collected on the way. I wonder what our role in this journey was and is; readers, providers of a bed for the night, providers of meals and, in a very small way, fellow walkers.*

It is a good question. In some ways, I see everyone as 'collaborators' at different levels. I feel this way because I don't think it could have happened without the sharing, without the exchange, without the hosting, without someone to walk next to, without an ear in the ether to type to after the long day's walk was done. So, we are collaborators, all. I may have been the only constant, but each day, each host, each walker, each stranger I met – each one changed the emotive or aesthetic qualities of the walk. Recognising that this is not a single act, but hundreds of exchanges, makes it difficult to diffuse and almost impossible to talk about. It cannot be spoken about as



a single thing because it is an amalgamation of all walking, writing and photographic experiences, but also the stories of Mark and the Ham Radio, of Marie-Joseph and her Horse, of C and the Table Placement Co-incidence, of Annie and Nicky's Great Trek, of Emily's 70th Birthday, of Claudia's Great Idea, of Franz's Non-Religious Religious Quest, of Edith and My French Firework Family, of Joss and the Shoes, of Jonathan and His Big Lonely House, of Rachael and her Anchoring, of Emma and the Cables, of Sophie and The Pizza, of Amy and Matthew in the Rain, of Sally and her House of Stuff, of Karen and her Walking, of Ruth in the Rain, of Caroline and The Television, of Fiona and the Foraging, of Peter and the Stolen Stick, and a million other truly meaningful stories. It's like fog. Or, better, it's like the clouds: diffusing and beautiful and powerful, full of potential, but up close, it's just tiny, endless drops of water.

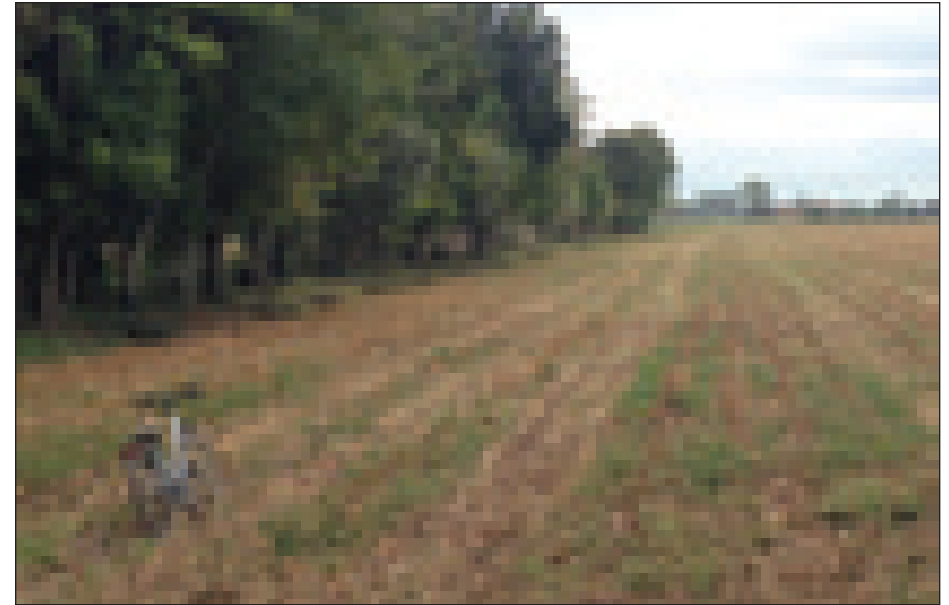
I will need distance to truly understand it all – like seeing the clouds from afar today. Matthew, my host from Canterbury writes: *Something tells me you'll have the walk inside you for a while yet. Maybe needing to stretch your legs a certain distance each day, then still feeling its rhythms in your body, then in thoughts and dreams. You're not rid of it yet! It's got inside a lot of us.*

The Casuals – *Alla Fine Della Strada* 1969

## Day 81: Manerbio to Carpenedolo

31 km | 9 hours | 2467 km in total | Loft Hotel

East, through Cascina Monastero and into Leno, then north east into Ghedi. Leaving the town in the south east corner, head towards Breda Caterina, and continue east, passing south of Saint'Antonio, into Santa Christina, reaching the Fiume Chiese canal just east of that small town. Follow this south until the edges of Carpenedolo.



My mother joined me last night from Saudi Arabia, where she has been working. Being a creature accustomed to fine tastes, however, she insisted that we stay in nice hotels. I did not argue, because, it is best not to argue with one's mother. She is, I realise, just the person I need to help me finish this project. I've been gestating for eighty days, and it is time for things to be born and become things in their own right.

I've asked her to write a few words because my voice can become annoying, I'm sure. So, here's Mother:

*I would like to start from the end, and state that a Jacuzzi is the best thing after walking 26 km past scary dogs barking at our ankles and scary drivers going much too fast on small roads. Anthony forced me to do some 'off-roading', helping me climb up and down embankments, through brambles, on slippery hillsides in order to reach our paths. He was unerring in his directions, and I never doubted his navigation for a second. Thank goodness he does not have my 'I'm continually lost' genes. The most memorable time today was hearing church bells as we crossed a very pretty alfalfa field. It gave me a true sense of being in Italy (ed: the stench of the manure being spread on the adjacent field didn't seem to affect her.) We collapsed for lunch on the side of a canal, me leaning on my backpack for support, but I had no appetite for cheese and bread, so I ate chocolate. Anthony was so encouraging: I was so jet-lagged and discombobulated that I found thinking about anything other than putting one foot in front of the other rather difficult. My body rebelled when we had about 2 km to go. Everything ached. And, but for Ant's gentle encouragement, I would have sat down on the road and would probably be there still, now. What struck me was how isolated he has been as he's journeyed along. We saw, from a distance, about five humans (and ten times as many dogs) all day. I kept wondering where everybody had gone. I love that he has had such support from so many people. But suffice to say I am thrilled to be here. He is very good company and we had some very interesting discussions all day. I*

*look forward to a good night's sleep and maybe tomorrow I will be better company and be able to talk of more coherently about this amazing project.*

In reading what she wrote, I realise how much of my mother's son I am.

Mos Def – *Travelling Man*

## Day 82: Carpenedolo to Valeggio

30 km | 9.5 hours | 2497 km in total | Fin Motel

East to Gozzolina, on small roads to take you through Freddi, and to industrial area, south of Solferino. From there, south east to Cavriana, further parallel to SP-15, below Fontana, Bezzeti, Goddi, Ariano, meeting up with the river Mincio just after Gobbini. Follow North to Borghetto, then up hill and into Valeggio.



A man stops his tractor and points to the carriage in the back, filled with plump, purple grapes. He gestures for us to take some, and so we take a small handful, and then he looks at us, pleading and dismayed, as only an Italian man can, and gestures for *more, more, please take more!* So we take two large bunches and thank him profusely. He waves his hand as if it is nothing and drives off. We walk past a Kiwi fruit plantation and it's strange to see such an 'exotic' fruit in such a context, with Italian church bells ringing in the distance. But here they hang, furry little things, still unripe but eagerly growing ready. We walk past a large orchard, but the fruit has already been harvested. I do not recognise the tree and so I ask my mother what variety she thinks it might be, and she guesses: *apricot*. I pick a leaf and crush it between my thumb and

forefinger, and, sure enough, the smell of apricot escapes into the warm sunshine, drifting off on a cool breeze.

The soy beans are browning; the wheat and corn has already been collected: this is such a fecund area, things almost bursting with nourishment. I can see why people want to live here. It makes me think of 'site'. Of a specific place where only a particular event is occurring or has occurred. The word derives from the Latin 'situs', meaning 'local position'. This local position is filled with agriculture, of growth and food. This sits in contrast to my walk as I have been walking through endless 'sites' – areas of particular local meaning and position. But I have also been occupying my own 'site': the walk itself. It's like the landscape of my path is its own 'local' position, being connected and linked by my steps. An ephemeral local geography. And these writings have been the map to read that topography. It provides me with structure, with direction, with focus and with a particular local position conceptually, and emotionally. It is a site of my own making, and with its own local position. And like this particular Italian site – loaded with fruit and food – it has fed me, nourished me, and I am sure it will continue to, even after I have finished.

Six days of walking left. I find it hard to reconcile 'six days' with the gigantic path behind me – what was I doing on Day 19? Or Day 34? Or even Day 66? I know that six days in – 76 days ago; almost three months ago – I climbed over two hills and arrived into Burntisland to find Caroline waiting and ready to look after my blisters. I saw Arthur's Seat from across the Firth of Forth, and I knew I would be home soon, albeit temporarily. It seems a lifetime ago. It was a lifetime ago.

Lonnie Donegan – *Lonesome Traveller*

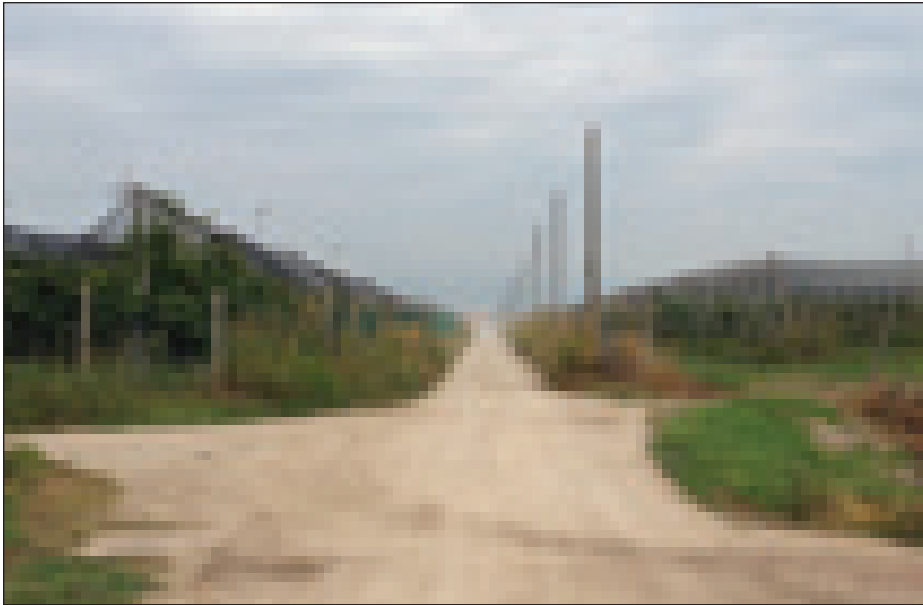
## Day 83: Valeggio to Castel D'Azzano

16 km | 4 hours | 2513 km in total | Hotel Corte Del Paggio

A farming road of the SP-24 branches almost due east, below Gherla, follow this through Rosegaferro and into Villafranca di Verona. Heading north through this town, turn east towards Povegliano Veronese, continuing onwards, skirting south of Madonna Dell'uva Secca, and directly east to Castel D'Azzano.

Today is the last day of walking with my mother. It has been strange to adapt to a different pace, but probably good for me. After all, in five days' time, I will be re-adapting to a whole new pace of life, entirely. One that is not based in long-distance walking. Or carrying 12 kg on my back, every day. Or sleeping in a different bed, every night. So, I enjoy the slow steady plod. It is a short day, and so we have all the time in the world. It is pleasant to walk through the orchards and chat. I do my best to keep her spirits up and distract her from her obvious jet-lag and pain. She is a trooper and doesn't complain once, despite having some monster blisters. I obviously have inherited her 'determined-stubbornness-in-the-face-of-difficulty' gene. So, thank you for that, and the time we spent together, Mother.

As I trickle down to the last five days, I feel like there should be some last minute denouement, a final crescendo, some dramatic last minute tragedy: a broken leg; a snake-bite; or a crisis of faith. But, I am also aware that life is not like that, and things



sometimes just wind down. The Huntly Team have left Base Camp and are already on their way to Venice to prepare things. Husband is preparing to arrive. My last few days are already mapped out. Plans for where The Oak will be planted are being finalised.

I guess the only thing to do is walk there.

I see my first road-sign for Venice today. It looms and approaches. I wish I could say that I am the *Rough Beast Slouching* towards that artistic Bethlehem, but I am only a dirty, skinny artist with little to offer but some questions and stories of love and generosity. I am not sure what I will offer that place once I arrive.

And, much like the question of how I should encapsulate the entirety of this project, I am not sure how I will approach that endpoint. It seems so massive, and yet so quietly final.

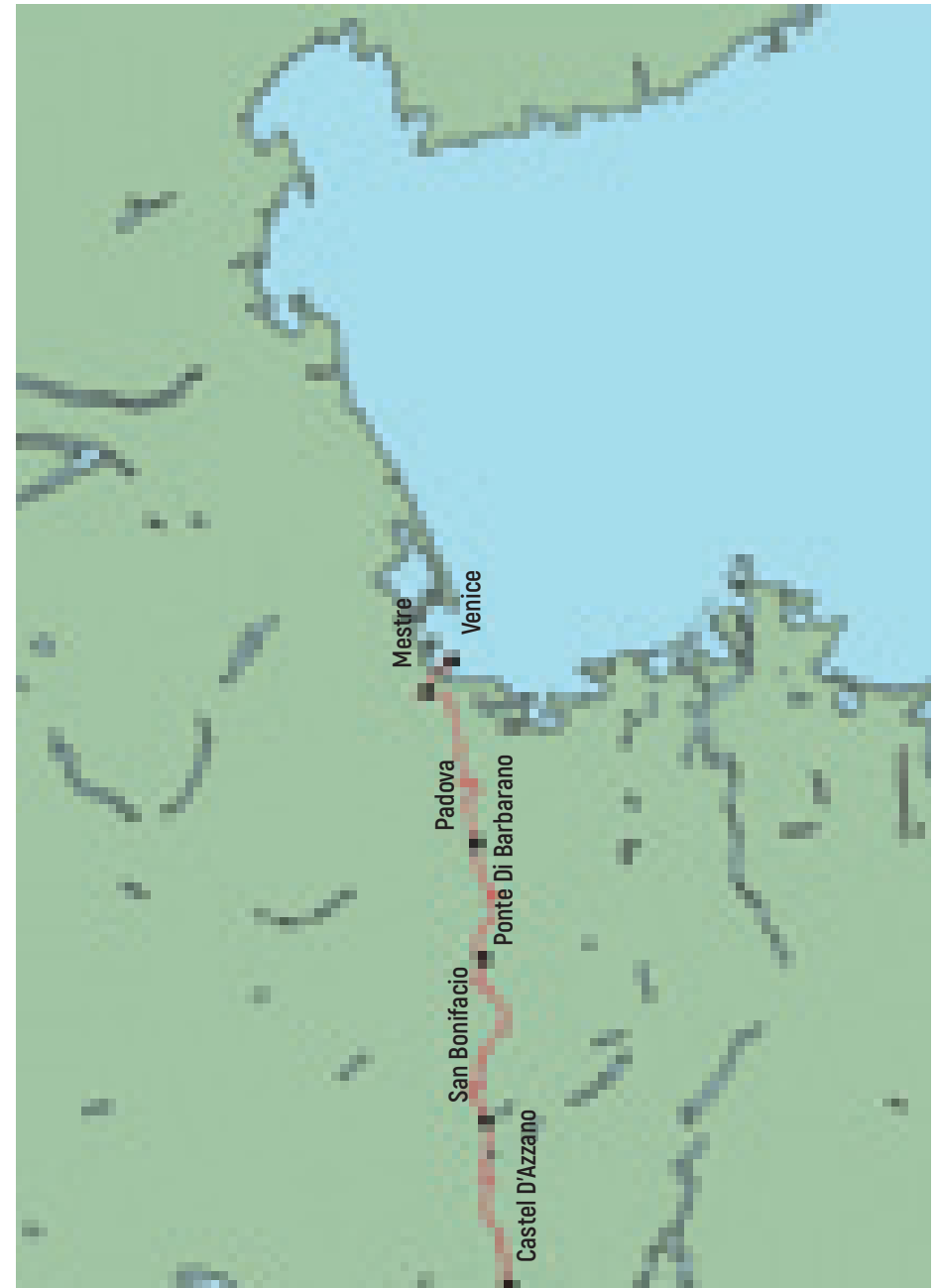
Nick writes to me and his words seem to sum my thoughts: *I guess it will be strange when you can stop – maybe like a sailor after years at sea and having to get used to being back on land again.*

Indeed.

So, here I am. Walking to an island to learn how to stop walking.

Neil Young – *Walk With Me*

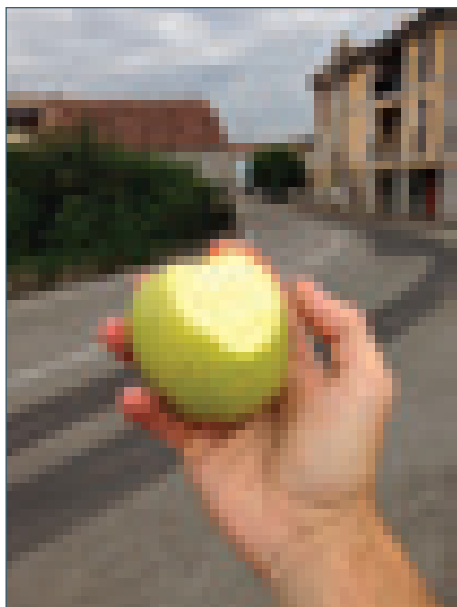
## Section 12: Castel D'Azzano to Venice



## Day 84: Castel D'Azzano to San Bonifacio

34 km | 6.5 hours | 2547 km in total | Hotel Villa Malaspina

North, turning east to veer under the railway line, just south of Terminon Dell'olmo. Easterly to Ca'Di David, Comotto, meeting the river Adige at Pontoncello. Follow this east until Zevio, then cross north and head briefly north until meeting the canal. Follow this until Porto, cross north and go through Belfiore. North east on SP-38 to San Bonifacio.



At breakfast, before I leave my Mother, she says that she keeps thinking of the Bayeux Tapestry when imagining this project. I ask her why, and she says it is because there are all these stories, interconnected but separate. Narrative, but not linear. She explains that it's like the 'tale of a hero' in that there are different tableaux of my experiences – The Grenade, The Breaking of The Stick, The Host Who Had The Guns, The Crossing Of Dangerous Bridges, etc. I told her I liked the idea, but wasn't sure it was right. It was too self-centred for something that has been so plural.

Later, as I am walking, I realise that she is right: it is like a tapestry, but not the Hero's Journey that she suggests. Rather it is a tapestry of an entire community. I have perhaps been the single repeated character, but the tapestry is of everyone, of all the participants: those that hosted; those that read the blog; those that walked

with me; those that watched from windows or cars; those that stopped and talked; those that commented and those that did not. It's not a single person's story, and that's what I have loved the most about it. We have sewn and knitted it all together. Perhaps, that is why I struggle with understanding the project as a whole, because I am so close to it. I can only see the stitches my feet make on the fabric ground, but like any tapestry, you have to stand back to see it all.

As I am thinking about this, I walk through Belfiore – a wee village – where a man driving a tractor full of apples stops and asks me (in Italian) where I am going and where I have been. I try to explain in my broken Italian what I am doing, where I am going and where I have come from, but he does not understand. I assume we will just give up on the exchange and go our separate ways, but he stops, turns his tractor around and gestures me to follow his tractor. So I do. And he drives slowly back to a house and calls a young gentleman out, explaining to me that the young man speaks English. The man is in the middle of his dinner and still holds a fork. I apologise. He smiles and I explain what I am doing and why.

He translates for the farmer, and the farmer smiles broadly and leans back into his

carriage and picks me an apple. He explains that it is fresh from the tree this morning, to his tractor, to his hands and now to mine. It is the sweetest, most perfect apple I have ever had.

Gunnar Olsen – *The End Is Near*

## Day 85: San Bonifacio to Ponte Di Barbarano

28 km | 6.5 hours | 2575 km in total | Hotel Stadio

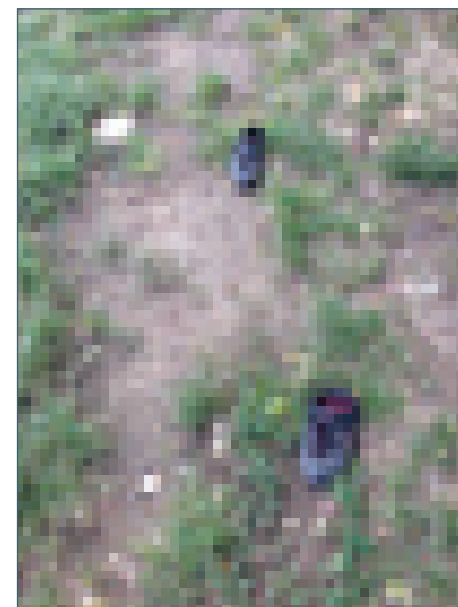
Follow SP-38 out of San Bonifacio, through Lobbia, and into Lonigo. South east to Case Molle, and stick close to the hills without climbing through Alonte and into Orgiano. Trace the SP-8 into Sossano, north to Ponte-Alto, Belvedere, Fogomorto, intercepting with SP-247 up into Ponte di Barbarano.

Tomorrow is my last day walking alone. Claudia, Rachael, and Camilla of the Deveron Arts team will join me for the last few days, meeting me in Padua, at the Basilica of Saint Anthony, my namesake. I am somehow daunted by the thought of being joined by *more* than one other person: almost disappointed I can't do the whole thing alone.

So, to enjoy my last solitary day, I reflect on all the people who have been with me on the way – walkers, hosts, families, critics, friends, every one. There's been so many that I might have to walk more than 30 km just to fit all that reflection in.

Sam Ainsley suggested this project was about stories and agrees that my mother's idea of a tapestry works well. She wrote to tell me of an interview she read with Edmond Due Waal: *You are inspired by not one person, but by many. The German poet Paul Celan talked about the companions you need on your journey. Some join you for part of the journey and some fall away. But it's plural.*

One of the constant companions I have had – apart from The Oak and The Damned Stick! – has come in the form of song. My friend Gerrie Van Noord has sent me a song for every day of my walking. She still has a few more days to go and has assured me that each song, like every song sent before, will relate to walking. For example, Johnny Cash's *I Walk The Line* from Day 2, Day 13 was Cat Power's *Paths of Victory*, Day 32 was The Chemical Brothers' *The Golden Path*, or Day 64: The National's *Walk Off*. Her song choices have often been prophetic – Air's *Universal Traveller*, the day I left the UK and entered a new country. Or Day 63's Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill*, for the day I began the Alps climb. She has an uncanny knack to capture me in song, and this entire list represents the breadth of experiences in this tapestry, in their difference





and in their unified theme.

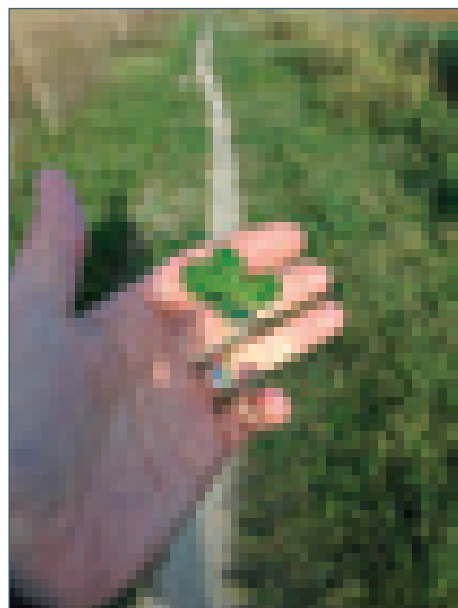
In the same way that those that inspire you/one are singular but also plural.

The Rolling Stones - *Midnight Rambler*

## Day 86: Ponte Di Barbarano to Padova

28 km | 6 hours | in total 2603 km | Nicola and Claudia del Santo

East to Monticello, over the A-31, and continue to Fornasetta. Curving around the hill, head south to Fontane and then into Treponti. Here, take the SP-89. Intermittent cycle paths and pavements for the first 2 km, and then have good cycle/walking routes all the way into Padova, over the rivers and railways.



Nicola and Claudia, my beautiful hosts – in the middle of harvest and moving house and heavily pregnant – accept me into their house with such ease that I forget they are complete strangers. I help them pack and move a washing machine, and in the morning, after they drop me off, I walk into the rising sun, and as usual, cut through the morning's fine silk of cobwebs. My first thought is: *I will miss walking into these cobwebs*. And I pause and smile because before I began this walk, I was petrified of spiders. I hated their webs. Now, I have walked through so many that they don't scare me anymore. How much I have changed!

This mad plan to walk to the Venice Biennale was hatched after not being accepted to represent Scotland in the show. We (Deveron Arts and I) thought: *well, we'll just make our own way there*. We planned to use the walk as a way to reflect on what a

place like the Venice Biennale means to those of us who make participatory art works. Almost 2500 km later, I no longer think of the Venice Biennale as a 'sacred site'. I have now re-configured what I choose to value. Power, I understand, is only half taken: it is also half given. I now choose to give power to those process-led, participatory and social exchanges with people, hosts, walkers, kind strangers, that have occurred along the way. This is where the art exists, and getting to the Venice Biennale becomes less and less important with every step. It is as if I have a pouch of gold coins that I am carrying with me to Venice. Each coin is a heavy token of 'value', each exploring various ideas: how the Venice Biennale values process-led exchanges; how those are represented; how those encounters are valued by the art world system. But, rather than carry those coins all the way there, it seems that every time I stopped en route –

every time I was helped; every time I was given sustenance (physical or emotional); every time I shared discussions or debates with people – I opened the pouch and left a gold coin with that person or people. As I approach the endpoint, the pouch is almost empty, with only two coins left. I will save one gold coin for Venice, because it is an important place, but it is not the only important site of art, and it would be a false prayer to give it all my gold. The other coin, I shall keep for myself. After 2500 km of walking and thinking about my sort of work and the Venice Biennale, I feel stronger in my practice, more certain about making art the way I do, and I have the confidence that making art that way not only works but is conceptually and aesthetically sound and critically relevant in the world today. And I truly feel that if the Venice Biennale ever wants this sort of work, ever wants me, it knows where to find me. The Venice Biennale can walk to me.

Ólafur Arnalds - *So Close* (feat. Arnór Dan)

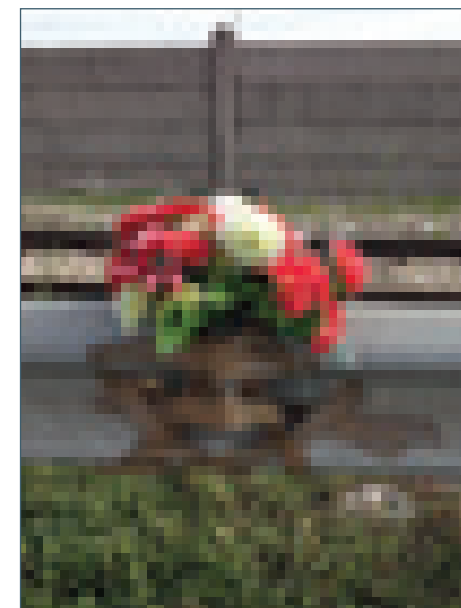
## Day 87: Padova to Mestre

38 km | 7.75 hours | 2641 km in total | Casa Camilla & Family

Directly east out of the city, meet with Canale Piovego, and follow this on the north side until Oltre Brenta. Here, cross the Brenta river, then cross to south side of canal and continue east, running parallel to the Naviglio del Brenta through Dolo and to Mira. At Mira, meet the Via Seriola Veneta Sinistra and follow until Malcontenta. Head north along SP-24 and SS-11, until meeting Via della Libertà. Using underpass under the railways, emerge into Mestre.

Last night Claudia, Camilla and I stayed with Camilla's parents – Florence and Giorgio in Padua. We visited the Cathedral of Saint Anthony and met priests tending to their flocks. We stood in front of Saint Anthony's larynx and lungs (his Godly Gifts of oration) and considered how we were lost and found. At Giorgio and Florence's, we arrive to boxes of handpicked hazelnuts from their own tree on the doorstep. Their house is as beautiful as a museum, and their warm hearts echo around us with laughter and love. Their kind warmth gives me the final burst of strength needed to get over today's distance. The walk is 10 km longer than all of us expected. I stagger into Forte Marghera after 7 3/4 hours, late afternoon, suddenly conscious that I have finished the last, long day.

Finding a quiet place to stretch and contemplate the near impending end, I sit



down and see a cat sleeping by a small lake, dozing in the weak 4pm sunshine. The cat is disturbed by my collapse, and looks up, unconcerned, then returns to its dozing state. I want to grab it and shake it and scream: *Do you know how far I have walked?!? Do you know how difficult it was? Do you know how long it took and all that I have seen and done?* But, it is just a cat, and it doesn't care. And why should it? Why should anyone? Indeed, I've accomplished something, but I've not changed the world, and so I let the napping cat sleep while I stretch away my aching calves and hamstrings. My feet feel like gristle and meat. My hip-flexors are strings of fire. My brain is stunned and unthinking. I am not quite sure my body or my mind understand that it is all almost over. I honestly don't know what to say. Or what to feel. So I keep focused on what is in front of me right now, and pack away my dirty socks and pants and prepare for tomorrow. Tomorrow, it is a short 10 km from Mestre to Venice, to the gates of the Venice Biennale. And then I will be done. I will have drawn a path in my own footsteps from Huntly to Venice. An indelible, ephemeral mark. A river in the wrong place, coursing its own way to the sea.

Thinking about it all, I write this poem:

*The ache and retch of this corpse is almost a memory, almost a historical fact,  
a forgotten map that has a single line upon it.  
Instead, the land erodes and builds itself up again:  
it draws itself another path  
It's an un-certain, exciting geography:  
the world is just beginning.*

Brian Eno - *An Ending (Ascent)*



## Day 88: Mestre to Venice

16 km | 4 hours | 2657 km in total | Live Arts Cultures, Forte Marghera

Weave until parallel to SS-11, and follow on south side of motorway, into industrial areas, and through Porto Marghera, eventually finding the Via della Liberta again. Southeast along cycle path until you reach Venice. Meander through canal and small streets to Piazza San Marco. Then follow the water's edge directly to Venice Biennale main gates. Do not go in.

I am here, and I am overwhelmed by love.

Radiohead - *There There*





## Days After: Venice to Edinburgh

### Home

Bus to Marco Polo Airport. Argue with airline that The Stick is an artwork, but it still has to be checked into the hold. Fly from Marco Polo to Edinburgh, via Paris, and arrive late at night, to find the Airline has lost The Stick. Take a taxi home and drop your bags at the door, close it quietly and stand very, very still. Breathe.

The day after arrival, we planted The Oak in the Arsenale: a small ceremony with nine people. The Oak is now between two other Beuys' Oaks and once it's planted, I have to leave, quickly, because I am too emotional. I find it difficult to say goodbye to him and his tattered leaves.

A few days later, I am flying home. Morrissey's *Every Day Is Like Sunday* is being muzaked through the dry air of the plane. I will soon leave the place I walked miles and miles to get to. Arriving in Venice was difficult and complicated, but no more so than the process itself. I was met with a parade and a welcome picnic, and a surreal experience of press and a million congratulations. Then two days of press, lectures, video-conferences, thank-yous and catch-ups. I still don't feel I have arrived. I probably won't until I am safe in my home, for even now, my legs feel like they should be walking. Instead, they're sitting in a cramped plane. The solitary time has been replaced by the cattle of commercial travel. The silence has been replaced with the chatter of laughing people and the eager jets of the plane. It all seems utterly normal and utterly foreign to me. And, perhaps, this is why I am unsettled: in this world, we enter and depart rooms, open and close the doors that start and begin new things. It is only the threshold of passing between those things that is difficult. So, now I dive into weeks of back-logged work and life, clearing the grooves of leaves so the tram of my life can run smoothly. I think it will take weeks. It will probably take months.

On Day 29 Barbara Steveni gave me a small spirit level. Blood red with a small bubble of air, she gave it to me saying I should use it to keep my own spirit level. I have used it on mountains and plains. Resting it on my palms or on my knees or just next to me. It was the most thoughtful and powerful of gifts, because it reminded me to take care of myself. She wrote me a message the day I arrived: *You're... held together by that brave body: suffering, recovering etc. I will have to come and find out who and what is the Anthony now? When you've recovered because tho' you were beginning to answer that, reflection in 'normal' circumstances will temper it.* Indeed. It all seems so surreal – the quiet cold of walking in the early light is not a reality anymore. The ritual of packing every morning is no longer true. The soft cross of a cobweb across my body doesn't happen. It all seems like it happened to a different person, a long time ago. I will be walking in my head for days to come, I am sure, and as I adjust to the new/old terrain of how life was 2657 km ago, I shall keep the spirit level handy.

## Facts and Figures

### On the road

Total Distance:	2657 km
Energy Consumed:	120594.407 KiloCalorie (Equivalent 80 kg of Semtex)
Energy Expended:	512423 Kilojoules (Equivalent to 109 kg of TNT)
Elevation - Ascent:	16164 m
Elevation - Descent:	16288 m
Max Gradient:	11.5%
Min Gradient:	21.5%
Avg. Daily Distance:	30 km
Avg. Distance/hour:	5.1 km/hour
Avg. Hrs Walking/day:	7.5 hrs
Longest day/Time:	Day 28, 13 hrs
Longest Day/Distance:	Day 28, 54 km
Shortest day/Time:	Day 44, 2.5 hours
Shortest day/Distance:	Day 70, 10 km
Countries:	5 (Scotland, UK, France, Switzerland, Italy)
Different beds slept in:	88

### In the pack

Electronic Equipment:	1 2-port USB charger 1 UK/Euro Power Adaptor 1 iPad Mini (2.0) & Logitech Blue Tooth Keyboard 3 Cables (Mac Lighting, Usb 2.0 & Sony charger) 1 external battery pack 3 Phones: (2 broke along the way - see Day 59) 1 GoPro Camera + Charger
Clothing:	3 shirts (2 t-shirts & 1-long sleeved. Generic) 2 trousers (North Face) 4 pairs of pants (Various) 4 pairs of socks (Bridgeend) 2 pairs compression socks (Karrimor) 1 Jacket (& liner) (North Face) 1 airline blanket (Stolen from KLM flight) 1 pair walking shoes (Merrell, size 7.5) 1 pair sandals (Columbia, size 8) 1 pair waterproof trousers (Bergman) 1 well-worn cowboy hat 3 pairs of sunglasses (2 broke along the way) 2 water bottles
Misc:	2 tupperware boxes (medium) (One for food, one for first aid pack) 1 thermal mug 1 Pen-knife, including small saw and scissors

### First Aid:

Zinc Tape -Wide (Lyon)  
Blister Plasters (lots)  
Ibuprofen (lots)  
Bandages/Plasters  
Vaseline  
BodyGlide  
Lip-Balm  
Sun Screen, SPF 50

### Songs

One of the most constant companions Anthony Schrag had – apart from The Oak and The (Damned) Stick! – came in the form of song. His friend Gerrie van Noord posted a song to him each day of walking, each one relating to walking in some way. These songs came to represent the breadth of experiences in this walk: so varied, so diverse, and yet all joined by a single theme. The songs she sent are listed at the end of every daily entry.

### Maps and Elevation

thanks to Google Maps, [www.gb.mapometer.com](http://www.gb.mapometer.com), Ordnance Survey and Open Street Map

